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*Photo Mary Laffan*

*Cromer*

# LORD CROMER

BEING THE AUTHORIZED LIFE OF  
EVELYN BARING  
FIRST EARL OF CROMER  
G.C.B., O.M., G.C.M.G., K.C.S.I.

by  
THE MARQUESS OF ZETLAND

*"The Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day,  
ye shall see them again no more for ever."*

—EXODUS xiv. 13

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## PREFACE

THE Life of Lord Cromer has been written at the request of the present holder of the title, to whom I am indebted for placing at my disposal the whole of his father's private papers. To others I am likewise indebted for permission to make use of private letters of which they own the copyright ; and for much valuable advice and information my thanks are due in special measure to a number of those who were personally associated with the late Lord Cromer in his work in Egypt. In this connection I would record my grateful acknowledgment of the assistance given me by Mr. Harry Boyle, who has thrown open to me unreservedly the rich store of his own intimate knowledge of Lord Cromer's life and work in Egypt during the long and eventful period of his association with him as Oriental Secretary.

ZETLAND.



## PROLOGUE

A TRAVELLER who visited Egypt in the early 'eighties of the nineteenth century, shortly after the occupation of the country by British troops, was forcibly impressed by the extent to which Time's hour-glass seemed to have stood still over the patient peasantry peopling the primitive villages of the Nile valley. These rude *fellahin*, whose monotonous and laborious days upon the land were varied only by days of even more strenuous toil exacted by the State, appeared to differ in no material respect from generations of their own ancestors from whom the kingly and priestly task-masters of a vanished age had wrung the hard-won fruits of their labour, and whose lives they had poured out like water in the construction of the vast series of imposing monuments with which they had embellished the land. "Here," he wrote as he gazed across the land from the waters of the Nile, "are the same men of the same build and stature, with the same dress or undress and the same implements, plying the same business as did their ancestors of five thousand years ago, so wonderfully depicted on the bas reliefs of royal and private tombs. . . . Civilization is foiled by a country which refuses to be civilized, which cannot be civilized, which will remain uncivilized to the end."<sup>1</sup>

The comment was perhaps a legitimate one at the time at which it was made. In the case of the mass of the Egyptian people—the *fellahin*, or those who tilled the soil—long centuries of apathy under a despotic and oppressive rule had induced a slavish disposition. They looked for little but the right to live and toil. Yet in the year 1882, when the above words were written, the

<sup>1</sup> The Hon. G. N. Curzon, afterwards Marquess Curzon of Kedleston. See the *Life of Lord Curzon*, vol. i., p. 81.

Egyptian people, though they were as yet scarcely conscious of the fact, stood on the threshold of an era of rapid and momentous change. It is scarcely too much to say, indeed, that during the next thirty years greater changes were effected in the status of the people, and in the system of Government under which they lived and toiled, than had taken place throughout the whole of the thirty centuries that had preceded them. And to an extraordinary extent those changes were the work of a single man—Evelyn Baring, first Earl of Cromer.

To the British public Lord Cromer was known vaguely as the Maker of Modern Egypt. To a smaller number who, whether from inclination or of necessity, were familiar with the stage on which during a period of thirty years, with one brief interval of service in another sphere, he played a leading part, the grounds on which his claim to such a title rested were clearly apparent and valid beyond all thought of challenge. If his work lacked something of the glamour of other and more spectacular careers, it was in part because the scene of it lay too far from these shores to permit of its obtruding itself, except spasmodically, upon the public consciousness, and in part because Lord Cromer himself, at all times curiously indifferent either to the presence or the absence of an audience, never dreamed of playing to the gallery. Yet, for those who followed step by step the inexorable progress of his plans towards their appointed ends, his work was certainly not lacking in dramatic quality. No fanfare of trumpets heralded the remarkable series of successes which crowned his efforts, whether in clearing the ground of thorny international complications, and so securing for Great Britain a free hand in the work of regeneration, or in guiding an effete Administration from the brink of bankruptcy to the threshold of prosperity or—most remarkable of his many achievements—in raising the *fellahin* from the depths of misery and depravity into which long

centuries of oppression had forced them, to the level of free men capable of appreciating and reaching after a life richer in material well-being and spiritual content than any that had hitherto come within their ken. No faufare, indeed, was needed; the results of his labours spoke for themselves. "To persevere and trust Cromer," became the watchword of the Englishman in Egypt,<sup>1</sup> and the trust which was reposed in him by those who were spectators of his work at close quarters was extended to him in equal measure by the public of Great Britain. The confidence of the Egyptian peasant in his benevolence was almost pathetic. It may be illustrated by a story. Cholera was raging in the Delta, and the task of those whose duty it was to protect the people against the dangers due to their own apathy and ignorance was no easy one. After many ineffectual remonstrances with the wife of a well-to-do farmer, a young English officer ordered the removal of the cess-pool which was so placed that it was contaminating the drinking-supply of the household. Whereupon the outraged housewife rose in her wrath and threatened him with an appeal to "the man Kroumer in Cairo," who would protect her against the tyranny of the high-handed and see that justice was done as between her and her oppressor. And if the trust of the ignorant and down-trodden *fellahin* was remarkable, the confidence of the cynical and sophisticated representatives of the Egyptian governing classes, who believed that there was no man living but had his price, was more impressive still. In 1880 a large sum of money was due from the Egyptian Government to the contractors for the construction of the harbour works at Alexandria. Could an arrangement be come to? Evelyn Baring said he would see what could be done. At the end of forty-eight hours of negotiation, terms which he thought reasonable were agreed between him and the contractors. The agreement, which had to be signed by Riaz Pasha, the Prime

<sup>1</sup> *The River War*, by W. S. Churchill.



Minister, was ready by three o'clock on the afternoon of the day on which the representative of the contractors had to leave to catch a steamer at Alexandria. Scarcely two hours remained in which to put the matter through. The account of what happened may be given in Baring's own words. "I thought this difficult, as Riaz Pasha had not yet had the matter explained to him. But I said I would do my best. I took the contract to Riaz Pasha and explained its provisions to him. He said that if I was satisfied he was ready to accept my conclusions and accordingly signed the contract without reading it."

What manner of man, then, was he who won and retained the confidence alike of a public proverbially fickle in its attachments; of Governments drawn from different parties, and professing and practising opposing policies; of the down-trodden masses of a people accustomed by tradition and by experience to look for nothing but tyranny and injustice at the hands of those placed in authority over them, and of the corrupt and sceptical members of an unscrupulous bureaucracy? And how came he to the land of Egypt? To these questions answers will, I hope, be found in the body of this volume; yet a brief preliminary survey will serve as a convenient introduction to the more detailed narrative that follows.

. . . . .

As a young man, Evelyn Baring enjoyed none of the advantages conferred by a university education. He was destined for the army in the bad old days of the Purchase System; and he was given the education which was regarded as sufficient to fit him for the career which had been selected for him. He has himself recorded how the master in charge of the preparatory school to which he was sent demanded his presence one morning, "and with a very grave face" told him that

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. i., p. 171.

he was not to do any more Greek, that he was to go to the Ordnance School, Carshalton, and eventually to Woolwich, and that, therefore, he had to learn decimal fractions. "I think his agitation arose principally from the fact that he did not know decimal fractions himself, his knowledge of arithmetic being confined to the simplest of vulgar fractions." Nevertheless, the modest obstacles in the way of entrance to Carshalton were successfully overcome – "I do not remember if there was any examination. If there was, it was a mere farce."<sup>1</sup> Neither at Carshalton nor at Woolwich can he be said to have been given even the rudiments of what is regarded in these days as a liberal education. Yet by middle age he was a man widely read and of highly cultured intellect who derived unusual enjoyment from a study of the classics; of liberal sympathies and broad and tolerant outlook; self-reliant yet, with all his readiness to accept responsibility, modest even to the point of diffidence; with a peculiarly well-poised mind characterized by great sobriety of judgment. He had, indeed, none of the dogmatic self-assertiveness which is not least among the qualities necessary for success in the arena of party strife; his was rather what Mr. Joseph Chamberlain once dismissed a little contemptuously as the cross-bench mind. And it was on the cross-benches of the House of Lords that he took his seat quite naturally after he returned from abroad on the completion of his long term of active service to the State. Had it chanced that he had been born a citizen of the Island Empire of the East, he would infallibly have found a place among the members of that famous Camarilla known to history as the Elder Statesmen of Japan.

His great natural gifts, without which so great a transformation between adolescence and middle age could scarcely have been effected, were an inheritance from his ancestors on his father's side – members of a

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notes.

family long famous in the world of business and finance – and from his mother, a woman of marked strength of character and of no mean attainments in the sphere of letters. For the cultivation of his gifts Evelyn Baring had no one but himself to thank. His intellectual attainments were the reward of a remarkable process of self-education begun well after the close of the normal educational age. And the enthusiasm and constancy with which he pursued his self-appointed task were all the more remarkable in that, as a young man at any rate, he was wholly devoid of personal ambition in the sense in which that term is ordinarily employed. Certain ambitions he had, though they were somewhat late in making their appearance. Thus the driving force behind the course of self-education on which he embarked after securing his commission in the army was a suddenly awakened desire to acquire such knowledge of ancient and modern languages as would render incursions into the world of letters intellectually enjoyable. More potent still, as an urge towards higher things, was the ambition stirred to sudden and poignant life within him by a chance meeting at the age of twenty-one – the ambition of making himself worthy of, and winning the love of, the woman who many years afterwards became his wife. But ambition in the sense of striving after place and power was altogether foreign to his nature. No thought of serving his country in diplomacy or in administration ever crossed young Baring's mind. The career that lay in store for him was wholly unpremeditated. He had no associations of any kind with Egypt. Was it, then, chance or Fate that directed his unconscious footsteps to her shores? Those who see in the individual lives of men the unfolding of a predestined plan will point to a series of events apparently unconnected, and often of little seeming importance in themselves, which combined, as if of set purpose, to lead him to the scene of his life's work. The chain of causality is sufficiently striking to merit mention.

In the first place, it has to be noted that though Lord Cromer's outstanding work in Egypt was carried through as the servant of the British Government, it was not to the Government, but to an individual, and to an individual for whose activities the Government firmly refused to accept responsibility, that he owed his first appointment in that country. The circumstances were these. Twelve years of reckless profligacy had brought Ismail Pasha, Khedive of Egypt, to the brink of the financial abyss ; and when, in the year 1875, he was driven to the desperate expedient of raising large sums of money by the issue of Treasury Bills at usurious rates of interest, it became clear to those chiefly interested that they were witnessing a gambler's last despairing throw. The result was never in doubt ; in April 1876 the debtor suspended payment and the creditors stepped in.

The arrangement came to between the Khedive and the hastily instituted Commission of the Public Debt failed to satisfy the bondholders, and in October, Mr., afterwards Lord, Goschen proceeded to Egypt on their behalf. In collaboration with M. Joubert, who similarly represented the French, a fresh agreement was negotiated, as one result of which an Englishman and a Frenchman were appointed respectively Controllers General of Egyptian revenue and expenditure. English interests were heavily involved ; but Lord Beaconsfield's Government, gravely preoccupied with other matters, refused to give further hostages to fortune by accepting any share of responsibility for unravelling the tangled skeins of Ismail's tortuous finance. They, therefore, looked on, and, while offering no objection to these appointments, formally disclaimed any responsibility for them. With equal determination they declined repeated invitations to nominate a British representative to the Commission of the Public Debt.

It was in these circumstances that the Khedive sought the good offices of Mr. Goschen. Mr. Goschen consulted

Sir Louis Mallet, a Civil Servant of high standing in London with an intimate knowledge of economic science ; and Sir Louis Mallet recommended Major Baring. It is here that the attention is arrested by the nature of the link in the chain of causation in which Evelyn Baring was caught up. The circumstances in which Sir Louis Mallet had become acquainted with him were wholly unconnected with the affairs of Egypt. His acquaintance with him was the outcome of a difference between Lord Beaconsfield's Government and the Viceroy of India on a question of tariffs, which led to the despatch of Sir Louis Mallet, at that time Under-Secretary at the India Office, to India for a personal discussion of the matter at issue. And here again it has to be observed that Major Baring's presence in India as private secretary to the Viceroy was due to a set of circumstances which had the appearance of being altogether fortuitous, and which in any case could not possibly have been foreseen. They were the assassination of Lord Mayo, whose term of office as Viceroy had still two years to run, and the chance association of Captain Baring with his cousin Lord Northbrook, at the War Office at the time when the latter was invited by Mr. Gladstone to fill the office thus unexpectedly rendered vacant.

And so the chain of seeming accidents might be traced back still further to a day in the year 1858 when Lieutenant Baring, a raw subaltern of artillery recently posted for duty to the island of Corfu, brought himself by a breach of military regulations to the notice of his official superiors, with the unexpected result that he was selected shortly afterwards for staff employment and thereby rescued from a monotonous and undistinguished life of garrison routine. To this brief sketch of the devices employed by Fate to bring the instrument of her choice in due time to the shores of Egypt may be added the fact that so little conscious was the future Lord Cromer of the destiny in store for him, that within a month of his arrival in the country he was seriously

contemplating resignation and a speedy return to England. Had he done so, as he has himself observed, his after life would have been very different from what it was, "and possibly the history of modern Egypt would have been in some degree changed."<sup>1</sup> But who can prevail against the decrees of Fate? The three daughters of Night had spun Egypt upon the thread at his birth, and in Egypt Baring remained. Twice subsequently he severed his connection—as he thought, finally—with the country, once in May 1879, when he returned to England with the intention of entering Parliament, and again in June 1880, when he was offered, and accepted, the post of Financial Member of Council in India. But always he returned—in the autumn of 1879 as Controller General, and in 1883 as British Agent and Consul General.

There were many posts of high distinction which Evelyn Baring, had he been so minded, might have filled. At one time or another he declined invitations to represent his Sovereign at Berlin, at Vienna, and at Peking. In 1892 he dallied with the idea of going as Ambassador to Constantinople. But Fate once more waved a forbidding wand. Abbas II had become Khedive of Egypt, and by his folly had once more embroiled the affairs of the country, rendering it impossible for Baring to leave. Pondering upon the matter in after years, he acquiesced in the wisdom of Fate's decision: "My Egyptian work has been far more interesting and productive of result than anything I could have performed by barren and irritating labour on the diplomatic treadmill at Constantinople."<sup>1</sup> Two years later he was offered the post of Viceroy of India: "I was summoned to Balmoral, and some royal pressure was put upon me to accept the offer. Nevertheless, I declined it."<sup>1</sup> He was daily becoming more interested in Egyptian affairs, and more and more convinced that his continued presence in Egypt was desirable. Indirect

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notes.

approaches made from time to time with a view to ascertaining if he would accept office in England were always "nipped in the bud," and this for various reasons, prominent among them the claims of his work in Egypt. "I believe I have been doing much more useful work in life by remaining in Egypt than would have been the case had I engaged in the wordy strife—often sterile of result and to me always distasteful—of Parliament."<sup>1</sup> When, therefore, in December 1905, he was offered the post of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, he declined it.

The history of modern Egypt will not be told in any detail in these pages, since it has been written by Lord Cromer himself and is within reach of all who wish to avail themselves of it. It will be recalled only in so far as seems necessary to do justice to Lord Cromer's work and personality; and for the same reason an amount of space which in other circumstances might be deemed to be disproportionate will be devoted to other and less known periods of his life. But here, on the threshold of the story, let me place in its readers' hands the master key to the guiding principle and the supreme achievement of his work in Egypt. The inspiration of all his work was a passionate but sane Imperialism. With another great proconsul of the twentieth century he conceived of Empire as "a pre-ordained dispensation, intended to be a source of strength and discipline to ourselves and of moral and material blessing to others"; a mission permeated with "the supreme idea without which it is only as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, namely, the sense of sacrifice and the idea of duty."<sup>2</sup> Above all other objects of Lord Cromer's conception of Imperialism stood the conferment of "moral and material blessings" upon others. That was the constant aim and the ultimate achievement of his work in Egypt. To the complaint that Great Britain derived no gain

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notes.

<sup>2</sup> Speech in Birmingham in December 1907 by Lord, afterwards Marquess, Curzon of Kedleston.

from the occupation of the country he had a ready and an inspiring answer :

*Is there no gain ? Ah ! feeble mind,  
 Still grovelling in material mire !  
 Thus sordid Mammon, ever blind,  
 To Paradise could ne'er aspire.  
 Is there no profit when the slave  
 Who groaned beneath the tyrant's ban,  
 Crushed from the cradle to the grave,  
 Has learnt the dignity of man ?  
 Is it no gain to hear the knell  
 Resounding for the accursèd work,  
 Forged in the inmost depths of Hell  
 By Satan's ready tool, the Turk ?  
 Is there no profit when the flood  
 Is poured upon the fruitful soil  
 To cheer the peasant's sullen mood,  
 And yield a recompense to toil ?  
 Is it no gain that Themis rules  
 Where baneful Atë held her sway ?  
 That foul corruption's darksome tools  
 Shrink from the purer light of day ?  
 Is it no gain that wisdom's light –  
 The child of Science and of God –  
 Should pierce the black Egyptian night  
 Spread where the Sultan's horse has trod ?  
 Is it no profit, no avail,  
 To stay the Pasha's ruthless hand ?  
 To hush the widow's piteous wail,  
 The children's curse throughout the land ?  
 Is it no gain to stem disease,  
 To let the humble joy in life,  
 To grant the peasant rustic ease,  
 Where all erstwhile was fear and strife ?  
 Is it no gain that Hope should tread  
 Where gaunt Despair was wont to brood,  
 As, cowering o'er his hard-earned bread,  
 The serf his petty lord withstood ?  
 Is it no profit to apply  
 Ithuriel's spear to a race,  
 Withering of yore and doomed to die,  
 Now laurel-crowned with freedom's grace ?*



*Ah ! These are gains which angels greet,  
As joyously such deeds they see  
Inscribed upon the balance-sheet,  
Which lies in Heaven's chancery.  
Let these suffice for Britain's need –  
No nobler prize was ever won,  
The blessings of a people freed,  
The consciousness of duty done.*

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY YEARS

THE Barings of whom Evelyn, the subject of this Memoir, was a distinguished representative, hailed from Gröningen, in West Friesland. John Baring, the founder of the English branch of the family, settled at Larkbeer, near Exeter, in 1717, where he carried on the business of a merchant and cloth manufacturer. Two of his sons – John, born in 1730, and Francis, born in 1740 and created a baronet in 1793 – moved to London, there to establish the firm of Baring Bros. & Co., which was later on to become a power in the world of finance. Other members of the family migrated to Hampshire, where representatives of the different branches are to be found to-day – Lord Northbrook at Stratton and Lord Ashburton at the Grange. These were not the only peerages that came as rewards for service to members of this brilliant and public-spirited family, for Edward Charles, son of Henry Baring, M.P., a partner in the firm of Baring Brothers & Co., was created Baron Revelstoke in 1885 and Evelyn, a younger son of the same Henry Baring and great-grandson of John of Larkbeer, added in 1892 the Barony, in 1899 the Viscountcy, and in 1901 the Earldom of Cromer, to the family honours. Henry, a younger son of Sir Francis Baring and grandson of John of Larkbeer, was twice married, having three sons and two daughters by his first wife, a daughter of Mr. William Bingham of Philadelphia, and seven sons, of whom Evelyn, born at Cromer Hall, in Norfolk, on February the 26th, 1841, was the sixth, and one daughter by his second wife, Cecilia, daughter of Admiral William Windham of Felbrigg Hall in the same county. The picture of his father that lingered in Evelyn's boyish

memory was of an old gentleman in a stiff white choker and nankeen trousers which buttoned at the ankle, who took snuff from an old-fashioned gold snuff-box and went out shooting on a rough but well-trained pony.

Truth to tell, young Evelyn saw little of his father, for he was an invalid during the latter years of his life and died in 1848, when his twelfth child was only seven years old. He saw even less of some, at least, of his nearest relatives, for he records the fact that when calling one day on his half-sister Emily, the wife of Mr. Bridgman Simpson of Babworth, in Nottinghamshire, he was introduced to an old gentleman, whom he had encountered on the doorstep, as his own half-brother, Drummond. "I had never met him before," noted the future Lord Cromer, at that time a man of thirty-five, "and," he added, "I never saw him afterwards."<sup>1</sup>

But, though he saw little of his father, he was nevertheless indebted to him for certain characteristics which served him well in after life. Henry Baring, a man of the most scrupulous honour and remarkable for his courtesy, inherited the family genius for finance; and it was due, perhaps, to the fact that his inclinations lay in the direction of a life of pleasure rather than of business that it took the form in his case of an inordinate love of gambling. It was said of him that he was "passionately fond of play, and indulged in it with so much success that he several times broke the *Enterprise Générale des Jeux* of Paris"<sup>2</sup>; and it is believed that the London house - No. 11 Berkeley Square - in which he was living at the time of his death, had been taken over from Lord Orford in satisfaction of a debt incurred at cards.

But if from his father Evelyn Baring inherited both a love of cards and a genius for finance, there were other qualities in his intellectual make-up that he as surely inherited from his mother. Cecilia Windham was liberally endowed with intellectual and artistic gifts which she

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notes.

<sup>2</sup> *Fifty Years in both Hemispheres*, by Vincent Nolte, translated from the German and published in New York in 1854.

was wise enough and ambitious enough to make the most of. Much of the knowledge which she acquired she owed to Miss Anna Guruey, a remarkable woman who lived near Cromer, and who, being a chronic invalid, had devoted her life to philological and other studies. It was probably at her instigation that Mrs. Baring added a knowledge of Greek and Latin to fluency in French and German and to a perfect command of Italian. Familiarity with the classics was no more expected of a lady of fashion then than it is now, and Sir William Harcourt, who happened to remark at a dinner given by Mr. Henry Reeve, then editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, that there was no mention of the Druids in Roman literature, was not a little astonished when Mrs. Baring at once quoted a passage from Lucan disproving his assertion. Her associations with Italy were strengthened by the possession of a magnificent contralto voice which had been trained by Rossini and other Italian singers. In these circumstances it was not strange that her son should have possessed a strong latent love of literature. What is surprising is that so little trouble should have been taken either to develop, or even to ascertain, what hidden talents he might happen to possess. For Henry Baring, the father of a family of thirteen, the novelty of bringing up children had, perhaps, worn off, while his mother seems to have had views of her own upon the subject. Her methods were drastic. She threw them into the water, as Lord Cromer himself put it in after years, and expected them there and then to swim. This process, as he went on to point out, although it involved an imminent risk of drowning, was so far good, if it did not fail altogether, in that it tended to form a self-reliant and resourceful man. It was pursued relentlessly in his own case. At the tender age of twelve he was on one occasion sent off from Salzburg, in the Tyrol, to find his own way to London – this too at a time when the diligence had not been superseded by more modern methods of travel. He was left, in fact, to grow up as best he could by the light of experience, and

he was himself convinced that it was not until his mother discovered, many years later, that he was able to put her right over the translation of a chorus from the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus that she took the smallest interest in his future career.

In these circumstances young Evelyn found himself thrown for companionship chiefly upon the society of his brother Tom, his senior by two years, the source of a fruitful and life-long friendship ; for, though their subsequent careers diverged widely, Tom entering the firm of Baring Bros. and Evelyn finding his life's work abroad, they maintained throughout life a weekly correspondence. At home at Cromer the two boys spent their days in the company of the Norfolk keepers – " a fine manly race " – feeding the young pheasants in summer and ferreting with the rabbiters in winter. From these companions of their childhood they acquired an unmistakable Norfolk accent and a wholesome love of sport. But life during these early days was not lived only amid the simple surroundings and under the invigorating breezes of the Norfolk broads. There were periodic moves to London, when old Henry Baring and his wife drove off – there was no railway between Norwich and London in those days – in an unwieldy open carriage called a britschka, while the children followed as a matter of course in the van with the servants and the luggage.

In the capital, strange peeps of a world beyond Evelyn's childish comprehension flitted intermittently before his untutored but inquiring gaze. Henry Baring was on terms of intimacy with many of the celebrities of the day, and Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington were frequent visitors at his house, the latter, in the earliest recollection of little Evelyn, " a bent, white-haired old gentleman " who, meeting the children with their nurse returning from Hyde Park, " patted us each on the head and said he knew our father." In later years the small child, now grown up, used to chuckle over a letter in his possession addressed by a young man to this same

white-haired old gentleman asking to be enlisted in a cavalry regiment, across the back of which was written in the great Duke's own handwriting: "F.M. the Duke of Wellington is not employed in the recruiting service!" His father's intimacy with Sir Robert Peel was not without its influence on the political outlook of the future Earl of Cromer, for, unlike the bulk of the country gentlemen, whose view that Peel "ought to be hanged on the highest tree in the country" was voiced concisely and with emphasis in young Evelyn's hearing by his brother-in-law, Mr. Bridgman Simpson, Henry Baring deserted his former Tory principles and thenceforward became a Peelite.

But it was not only persons that left impressions on the plastic tablets of Evelyn's youthful mind. Curious scenes from the varied pageant of the greater life that pulsed around him thrust themselves from time to time upon his consciousness. A vision of crowded streets and of a strange figure acclaimed as Abraham Parker passing through their midst was such an one. Little can the small onlooker have foreseen his own future association with the land whence hailed the dusky figure—the Abraham Parker of the Cockney crowd: the Ibrahim Pasha, son of Mehemet Ali, of Egyptian history. Then, in 1848, there was frightened talk of an incomprehensible thing referred to by his elders as the Chartist Movement, a thing stamped on his puzzled mind by amusing antics on the part of persons usually staid and respectable enough, who seemed to be in some mysterious way oddly associated with it. There was, for example, the sudden appearance in their drawing-room one day of the familiar figure of Uncle Robert,<sup>1</sup> unfamiliarly but quaintly armed with a murderous-looking staff—the outward evidence of his recent enrolment as a special constable. If this unwonted spectacle excited little Evelyn's interest, it aroused in Mrs. Baring nothing but derision, for she cut

<sup>1</sup> Mr. R. Hook, who had married a sister of Mrs. Baring and was a member of the firm of Herries & Farquhar, afterwards merged in Lloyds Bank.

short his voluble explanations with the crushing remark, "Don't talk nonsense, Robert. You've a lot of snuff on your coat. Wipe it off."

Such education as he received at home was imparted to him in the earlier stages by his nurse, Ann Cox, whose husband had been an army corporal employed in the recruiting service; and later by a German governess, *Fräulein Ilhardt*, "a clever but ill-tempered woman." At the early age of seven and a half he was sent, in company with his brother Tom, to a small school at Hethel, near Norwich, kept by the Rev. Frederick Bickmore, his father having died a few months earlier, in April 1848. This small academy seems to have been of the type immortalized by Charles Dickens, Mr. Bickmore relying upon the rod rather than upon his own intellectual equipment to dragoon his youthful charges into the way that they should go, while Mrs. Bickmore, armed with a stout ruler, with which she impartially beat time and her pupils' knuckles, sought to impart to them the art of playing the piano. "Now, boys," exclaimed Mr. Bickmore cheerfully one evening, "I have been into the shrubbery and cut a hazel and an elm stick. The elm is for the boys who can't do their Latin grammar in the morning, and the hazel is for those who can't do their sums." It is on record that on the following morning young Baring duly received a liberal dose of each. From Hethel he proceeded, at the age of eleven, to the Ordnance School, Carshalton, a preparatory school for the Royal Military College at Woolwich, a military career having been decided on for him. Conditions here were worse even than at Hethel. The birch and the cane were both in constant use. From the administration of twenty-two strokes with the cane "delivered with all the strength of the head master's arm," young Baring bore the marks on his body for weeks afterwards. When the number of lines to be written out in a boy's imposition book as punishment for minor offences accumulated to such an extent as to render the discharge of the task impossible,

corporal punishment was administered, and the words "Cancelled by caning" entered in the book. The food was "detestable," and the provision made for cleanliness was small. In the summer, bathing was provided for in a lake in the school grounds; in winter, baths were supplied once a week – on Saturday nights. The same water had to serve for three boys, the last joined getting "third water."

At the age of fourteen Evelyn went on to Woolwich, which, under the direction of General Sir George Lewis, "a fine and very irascible old engineer officer, who had lost a leg at the siege of San Sebastian," still went on in the bad old ways. Young Baring himself was rejected for defective eyesight; but Mrs. Baring knew her Woolwich. Without a moment's hesitation, she drove down to the Horse Guards to see Lord Raglan, at that time Master-General of the Ordnance, and a friend of the Baring family. At his request the case was reconsidered and the candidate admitted. Reform, however, was at hand, following hard on the heels of the collapse of the old military system during the Crimean war. Favouritism was abolished, and appointments were made by open competition. All the old officers were aghast, it being widely believed that an entirely different social class would in future enter the army. "These fears," as Lord Cromer noted in after years, "proved quite groundless. The social class remained precisely the same as before, whilst the intellectual standard of the officers was certainly much improved."

On June the 22nd, 1858, Evelyn Baring, at the age of seventeen, received his commission and joined the Royal Artillery, being posted to a garrison battery stationed at Corfu. He can scarcely have looked back on his school days with either pleasure or satisfaction. Undisciplined and anything but industrious, he was far from popular with the various masters with whom he came in contact. But that his somewhat inglorious school career was due to mishandling on the part of his



instructors, rather than to any lack of ability, is clear from what he accomplished on his own initiative. Before he left Cromer Hall at the age of eight he had read *Ivanhoe* and *The Bride of Lammermoor*, and could repeat from memory "Chevy Chase," "Lord Ullin's Daughter," "Johnnie o' Breadislee," "The Two Brothers," and other Border ballads. It was remarked too, that he was the only boy at Carshalton who took in and read a daily paper; and later on he developed quite spontaneously an extraordinary industry. It was, in fact, not until he had said good-bye to school, with its irksome discipline, its deadening routine, and its disheartening restraints, that there began the truly remarkable course of self-education which served him to such good purpose in his later years.

## CHAPTER II

### LIFE IN CORFU

IT was not due to mere chance that the young artillery subaltern was posted to Corfu. He had heard glowing accounts of the shooting in Albania, and it was at his own request, and through the influence of Colonel Wodehouse, a Norfolk man, at that time Adjutant-General of the Artillery, that he joined the garrison battery at that station. He certainly enjoyed some remarkable sport, his bags of small game including the following : on January the 22nd, 1861, with two other guns, 116 woodcock ; on February the 4th, a party of six guns, 125 woodcock and 4 duck ; and a few days later, with a gun less, 103 woodcock and 20 duck.

Curiously enough, it seems to have been his anxiety not to miss a shooting engagement that was responsible for a breach of military etiquette which at least brought his existence to the notice of his official superiors. It happened in this way. Not long after his arrival it fell to his lot to return the salute of a Turkish man-of-war which had come into the harbour. With commendable zeal he sought instruction in the performance of an unfamiliar duty ; yet if he displayed a wise precaution in consulting the battery sergeant-major, he none the less exhibited a contemptuous indifference to his instructions in carrying through his task. The rule, as quoted by the sergeant-major, was explicit ; each one of twenty-one guns was to be fired at regular intervals of fifteen seconds. To impetuous youth – he was under eighteen at the time – this seemed pitifully slow work, so he expedited matters by “thundering off three salvoes of seven guns each.” The reverberating crash of this heavily massed artillery broke rudely in upon the

meditations of Sir George Buller, the General Officer in Command, whose house happened to be immediately below the saluting battery, and even came to the ears of still higher authority, securing for the offender an altogether unexpected measure of notoriety. Was this one of those trivial incidents which so often seem to exercise as if by accident a determining influence on a man's career? To the future Lord Cromer it may well have seemed so, for he was always impressed by coincidences of the kind, and, as if to lend colour to a plausible superstition, one such happening came under his observation at this very time. Mr. Gladstone had been sent out by the Tory Government to report on the agitation which was then in full swing in favour of the restoration of the Ionian Islands to Greece. At a dinner given in his honour by Sir John Young, afterwards Lord Lisgar, and at that time Lord High Commissioner of the Protectorate, Mr. Gladstone, in the course of conversation, quoted some lines from Homer. The silence which followed was suddenly broken by a penetrating voice from the end of the table informing the guest of honour in the broadest of broad Scotch that his quotation was incorrect, and giving him the true version! The voice belonged to a young officer hailing from Aberdeen who had been one of the first to enter the Service under the system of open competition which had just superseded that of nomination. Mr. Gladstone, struck by such erudition on the part of a young subaltern, at once appointed him to be his assistant private secretary; and, though he died young, he lived long enough to rise from this small beginning to various high Colonial appointments and to become Sir George Strahan. Some years afterwards Sir Claude Macdonald, who became famous as the British Minister at Peking at the time of the Boxer rising, when the representatives of the Foreign Powers were besieged in their Legations, and subsequently as British Ambassador in Tokio, provided him with another example. Major Macdonald, then serving

as Military Attaché at the British Agency in Cairo, was nominated by Sir Evelyn Baring as the British representative in a special court set up to deal with a shooting affray between two young English officers and some Bedouins. His success in securing a unanimous report – his co-judges both being Egyptians – attracted Sir Evelyn's favourable notice, so that when, a little later on, a temporary vacancy had to be filled in the post of British Agent at Zanzibar, Major Macdonald was sent there on the Consul-General's recommendation. One such step led to another, Major Macdonald joining the Diplomatic Service and rising to become an Ambassador ; "all of which," noted down Lord Cromer, "would not have happened had not two young British officers accidentally peppered some Bedouins with snipe shot when out shooting near Cairo." It may have been nothing more than a coincidence ; but it was at least an interesting one that when, three years later, Sir Henry Storks succeeded Sir John Young as Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands, he should have selected as his personal assistants George Strahan, who had corrected Gladstone over a passage from Homer, and Evelyn Baring, who had played skittles with official decorum in the matter of a military salute.

Before this appointment came, however, to lift him out of the furrow of army routine, it is clear that a marked and rapid development was in progress in Baring's inner life. The activity of his mind had not been blunted by the inadequacy of his education ; on the contrary, it is probable that his intellect had been steadily if imperceptibly gaining vigour during the years throughout which it had been allowed to lie fallow. He had left Woolwich with no knowledge of the classics, with little more than a nodding acquaintance with French and German, and with a smattering only of mathematics. Of his favourite subject, history, he knew rather more. A dawning consciousness of the inadequacy of his intellectual equipment, aroused, perhaps, by contact with

persons better educated than himself, spurred him to action. A rapid acquisition of modern Greek under the guidance of a first-rate scholar named Romano inspired him with a desire to make the acquaintance of the classical writers. Beginning with Anacreon, he soon found himself on the threshold of a new and fascinating world into which from this time onward he delighted to push his explorations whenever the preoccupations of an unusually busy life permitted him to do so. Something of the satisfaction which he derived from these excursions became evident when, more than forty years afterwards, he published his *Paraphrases and Translations*,<sup>1</sup> consisting of a selection of the epigrams from the anthology and from the idylls of Theocritus and Moschus. But even this evidence of interest hardly provides the measure of his enthusiasm for Greek literature. Quoting with approval Professor Butcher's dictum that the Greeks possessed "that fearlessness of intellect which is the first condition of seeing truly,"<sup>2</sup> he declared that they had said "three-quarters of all that is worth saying on almost every subject"; and he prayed that, whatever changes time might bring about, Greek would never be altogether banished from the curricula of the English schools and universities.

The course of self-education on which he had embarked did not end with a study of Greek. He learned to speak Italian fluently, and he read most of the classical Italian poetry. He developed side by side with an extraordinary catholicity of literary taste an industry and power of concentration which permitted him to indulge it. Dictionary in hand, he went through the whole of the *Gierusalemme Liberata*; and in his new-found enthusiasm for study he acquired the habit of reading portions of the writings of such authors as Mill and Locke and then setting out in an abridged form what he could remember of the argument. Writing many years afterwards, with

<sup>1</sup> Published in 1903.

<sup>2</sup> *Some Aspects of the Greek Genius*.

a long career of brilliant administrative work behind him, he gave it as his considered opinion that the two works from which he had derived the best value in his own particular sphere of activity were Taine's *La France Contemporaine* and de Tocqueville's *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*. Not least among the merits of these two studies, he considered, was the fact that they taught a man what *not* to do. And as an indication of the comprehensive sweep of his outlook it is interesting to note that among the books which he read most often, and with the greatest degree of satisfaction, were the Book of Job, the first six and the last books of the Iliad, the tenth Satire of Juvenal, *Tristram Shandy*, the *Pickwick Papers*, *Soapey Sponge's Sporting Tour*, the Funeral Oration of Pericles given by Thucydides, which he thought the perfection of oratory, and Lycidas, which appealed to him as a masterpiece of melodious verse.

Here, then, at the age of seventeen or so, we see a new and altogether unexpected change in the course which Evelyn Baring had hitherto been steering, a change which is all the more striking in that it seems to have taken place without the spur of any particular ambition. Later a very powerful stimulus to effort was to present itself; but that was not until some few years at least after his passion for study had taken hold of him, and his extraordinary literary industry seems to have been born of a suddenly awakened love of learning simply for learning's sake. Yet it must not be supposed that his absorption in his academic studies lessened either his powers of observation or his practical interest in all that went on around him. His admiration knew no bounds when he witnessed eighteen line of battleships and frigates, with all sail set, sweeping up the Corfu channel. The æsthetic satisfaction which he derived from this spectacle did not, however, deter him from probing, with a certain practical determination to get to the bottom of things which he habitually displayed, into the concrete realities which lay behind the abstract idea of the British Navy. The

realities, as he saw them, were sadly disillusioning. The "jolly tars" of the song were sometimes anything but "jolly" when encountered in the flesh. When the "liberty men" were on shore, no respectable woman could walk about unprotected, and scores of British sailors were to be seen lying dead drunk in the streets of Corfu. The men of the *Princess Royal* refused to go aloft, and their comrades of the *Orion*, "broke the crockery which was their own property, and rolled the shot about the deck – both rather common forms of insubordination in those days." A court-martial held by order of Admiral Sir Fanshawe Martin, who commanded the Mediterranean fleet, resulted in a sailor being hanged at the end of the main yard of the *Orion*. Flogging was common in the navy and the army, and Baring himself witnessed punishment with the cat, at which he declared he had often seen onlookers swoon. Reforms, however, were at hand which, by the time that Baring was forty, brought about a revolutionary and salutary change in all these respects.

In the spring of 1861, being then twenty years of age, Evelyn Baring was granted leave to proceed to England, and travelled across Turkey in Europe from Durazzo, on the Adriatic, to Widdin, on the Danube. The experience was an interesting one. Since almost everyone except Bright and Cobden, whose ideas were generally scouted, held the policy which had dictated the Crimean war to be sound, he started on his expedition well disposed towards the Turks. Before his journey was over he had considerably modified his preconceived ideas. Wherever the Turk was supreme he found a salutary respect for authority, so that a traveller could pass safely and without escort through the most remote districts under their administration. But he encountered also squalor, desolation, and an absence of almost every trace of civilization. And, although he found an English military uniform a passport to the goodwill of the Turkish officials wherever he went, he finished his journey with his belief in the wisdom of a policy which had led to the spending of so

much British blood and treasure in support of a system of Government which produced such results seriously shaken.

During Baring's stay in England, his company was transferred from Corfu to Portsmouth; but he was destined to return to the former place, with results which were decisive so far as his own future was concerned, for he was appointed in 1862, at the age of twenty-one, to the staff of Sir Henry Storks, who had succeeded Sir John Young as Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands. He accepted the appointment willingly enough, since he found the routine of garrison life in England infinitely tedious; but he went back to Corfu with no greater ambition than to put in time until he could retire to lead a life of ease, tempered by such work as a dilettante's love of literature might bring his way. Least of all, as he has himself confessed, did he cherish any idea of rising to positions of eminence in the service of the State. But at Corfu destiny, in the shape of the second of the three beautiful daughters of Sir Rowland Stanley Errington, awaited him, pointing insistently the way. The accident of his meeting with her was decisive. Evelyn Baring's means were slender; his private resources, with the addition of his army pay, gave him an income of £400 a year. Marriage on this pittance was clearly out of the question; what, then, was he to do? Neither of them doubted; he would work and she would wait. With the attachment came that faith which is capable of moving mountains. Evelyn Baring's goal had risen clear-cut and beckoning upon the horizon. The urge to definite endeavour, hitherto lacking, now became a driving-force of incalculable power. An irresistible ambition seized him and became the absorbing passion of his waking hours—the ambition not merely of making marriage possible, but of rendering himself and his life's work worthy of the woman whose companionship he craved. It was one of the inestimable gifts of Providence to Evelyn Baring that, having brought within his purview a woman capable of devotion of the finest texture, she



should have endowed him with a capacity for appreciating and reciprocating it.

And since this chance meeting on an island in the Adriatic altered the whole course of Evelyn Baring's life, it is not without interest to trace the circumstances which were responsible for it. Rowland Errington, a man of fashion of the early Victorian period, who moved in the set associated with the Count d'Orsay, owed his baronetcy to the death of his elder brother, Massey Stanley, son of Sir Thomas, head of that branch of the Stanley family which at the time of the Reformation had adhered to the Church of Rome. But if he owed his title to the accident of death, he owed his name and some portion of his possessions to the friendship of the lonely scion of another Catholic family, of the name of Errington. Dying early in the nineteenth century with no near relations to mourn his loss, he left his property to Rowland Stanley, on condition that he assumed the name and arms of Errington. On the death at Homburg in 1861 of Lady Errington, a noted beauty of her day and daughter of Sir John Macdonald, who for many years had served as Adjutant-General to the Duke of Wellington, Sir Rowland Errington was left a widower with three daughters to look after ; and it was in these circumstances that he accepted the invitation of his sister-in-law, Lady Buller, wife of the General Officer in Command who had been so rudely disturbed by the thunder of Evelyn Baring's salute some years before, to pay a visit to the island. Of his three daughters, the eldest, Claudine, a lovely girl, died of diphtheria two years later, and the youngest, Venetia, became Viscountess Pollington, and subsequently Countess of Mexborough. Baring's attachment to Ethel, the second daughter, was profound and lasting ; and it was not until 1876, when he had attained the age of thirty-five, that the long and ardent courtship was brought to a close and the hardly-won marriage took place.

In the meantime his sojourn at Corfu was fruitful in

adding both to his knowledge of affairs and the circle of his friends. At Cettigne he made the acquaintance of Prince Danielo, the ill-starred ruler of Montenegro who died a violent death soon afterwards at the hand of the assassin ; and on the same storm-wracked mainland he had opportunities of observing the methods, and their consequences, of two very different types of British public servant – Lord Stratford, the high-handed autocrat, and his successor as Ambassador at the Porte, Sir Henry Bulwer, afterwards Lord Dalling, “ an eccentric hypochondriac,” whose respect for the letter of the official code came as an unpleasant surprise to those members of the consular service who had developed initiative and independence under the individualistic régime of his dominating predecessor. Other pieces from the chessboard of Eastern Europe flitted intermittently across the scene – King Otho and Queen Amalia, swept from the board by one of the periodic revolutions that have marked the stormy history of modern Greece and borne to safety, as so many other notable refugees have been before and since, on the deck of a British man-of-war. Amongst other visitors to the island were Edward Bulwer, afterwards Lord Lytton, engaged at that time in writing *A Strange Story*, and Edward Lear, the artist, with whom Baring struck up a deep and lasting friendship. Lear himself returned in full measure the affection which Evelyn Baring lavished on him, and wrote him letters in strange, incomprehensible phrases culled from his own inimitable vocabulary of nonsense words :

“ THRIIPPY PILLIWINX, – Inkly tinky pobblebockle  
 “ ablesquabs? Flosky! Beebul trimble flosky!  
 “ Okul scratch abibblebongibo, viddle squibble tog-a-  
 “ tog, ferry moyassity amsky flamsky damsky crockle-  
 “ fether squiggs.

“ Flinky wisty pomm  
 “ SLUSHYPIPP.”

Lear’s was a warm-hearted and lovable personality. He was a great admirer of Tennyson, and Evelyn Baring

caught him on one occasion sobbing with emotion over the piano as he played and sang "Tears, Idle Tears," which he had put to music. Yet so great was his whimsical sense of the ridiculous that he could not help poking fun even at those whom he admired most, and he confided to Evelyn Baring his own version of "In love, if love be love":

*Nluv, fluv bluv ffluv biours,  
Faith nunfaith kneer beekwul powers,  
Unfaith naught zwant a faith in all.*

Nothing tickled his sense of humour more than the fact that he should on one occasion have been taken for Lord Palmerston. In the monarchist capitals of the Continent, and not least in Neapolitan Court circles, Palmerston was detested as the embodiment of Liberal ideas. It happened that, whilst sketching in some remote Calabrian village, Lear's passport was demanded of him by a policeman. Finding it signed Palmerston, the excited minion of the law arrested him and marched him in triumph to the nearest village, shouting, "Ho preso Palmerstone!" ("I have taken Palmerston"). At Lear's death, in token of his affection for Evelyn Baring, he left him the rough sketches which formed the basis of many of his Corfu pictures.

The happy and formative days which Evelyn Baring spent at Corfu were brought to an end in 1864 by the decision of the British Government to cede the Ionian Islands to Greece. In circles which to-day would be described as "Imperialistic," this decision was vigorously denounced, both in England and on the Continent. "Un pays qui a cessé de prendre et commence à rendre," sneered Bismarck, "est dans sa décadence." In Austria fears were entertained lest "the key to the Adriatic" might fall into the hands of Italy, and, in deference to the wishes of the Austrian Government, the fortifications were blown up before the departure of the British garrison. Even in Corfu itself some apprehension was felt, for, on being asked how long a time would elapse

before the absence of the British garrison was likely to be felt, a leading inhabitant replied, "About half an hour." But Evelyn Baring never doubted that the decision was a sound one, and he applauded the wisdom of Palmerston and Russell who, contrary to popular belief, were in agreement with Mr. Gladstone in his advocacy of the cession of the Islands. His outlook was, in fact, definitely "liberal," not because he was attached to any particular political party, but because his own observation tended to convince him of the wisdom of what in these days would be described as a policy of "self-determination," and because his mind was naturally that of a reformer. Even the Whigs seemed to him in his early manhood to be unduly timid in their advocacy of change. He leaned instinctively towards the robust radicalism of men like John Bright, who carried him completely with him when, in a declamatory passage in a speech to which he listened at Glasgow, he declared that it was "a far cry from Belgrave Square to Bethnal Green." His own warm-hearted sympathies were all on the side of Bethnal Green. And in matters of foreign policy he leaned as emphatically towards the left. As I have already pointed out, his own observation in Eastern Europe led him to distrust the wisdom of the pro-Turkish policy associated with Disraeli; and in the animated discussions about Italian affairs in which he indulged during his residence in Corfu, he dissented vigorously from the pro-Austrian sentiments which were current in the circles in which he moved. "I was all for Cavour and Garibaldi," he has since declared. In later years his outlook underwent some modification, chiefly on account of Mr. Gladstone's championship of Irish Home Rule, and as a result of actual experience of the Liberal party's handling of affairs in Egypt. But that was not until he had himself learned by experience that, however admirable such phrases as "self-determination" may be in theory, there are often grave objections to applying them in practice.

## CHAPTER III

### AMERICA, MALTA, AND JAMAICA

WITH the cession of the Ionian Islands to Greece and his consequent departure from Corfu, Sir Henry Storks found himself for the time being without employment ; and Evelyn took advantage of his own temporary freedom to accompany Tom Baring to America. The brothers landed in America in stirring times. The struggle between North and South was in full swing ; in New York the trade on which the city lived was almost at a standstill ; and the fact that on landing Evelyn Baring received thirteen paper dollars for his gold sovereign apprised him of the extent to which the credit of the United States had fallen. It was characteristic of him that he should have relied upon his own observation and judgment in assessing the merits of the case as between the combatants. In London, Society and the Press headed by *The Times* had espoused the cause of the South. Of the opinion of Society, which in the 'sixties was a power in the land, he was not a little contemptuous ; it was usually wrong in its forecasts, he thought, and ill-judging in its sympathies. And as to the Press, he was convinced that it was guilty of a profound error — one, moreover, which proved to be enduringly mischievous in its results in that it was largely responsible for the unfortunate estrangement between the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race which persisted for forty years, until the outbreak of war between Spain and the United States provided an opportunity for correcting the error of 1864. In America itself the attitude of both Government and people was, indeed, bitterly resented. " A Whitworth shell from

a gun brought to Charleston by the British blockade-runners," was the bitter comment made to Evelyn Baring, who had joined the fighting line, when a shell dropped into a northern battery close by. And the escape of the *Alabama* from a British port added to the indignation. It was certainly not a natural inclination to be on the winning side that led the young artillery officer to espouse the cause of the North, for the Federal troops were far from happy. Communication between New York and Washington was temporarily cut, and fighting had taken place within five miles of the capital. Grant's frontal attacks against the entrenched Confederate troops were proving extremely costly, and Baring, who was fortunate in obtaining permission to proceed to his headquarters, learned that the casualties in the Northern Army during the seventeen days of the so-called Battle of the Wilderness which had just taken place were estimated by General Humphreys at not less than 70,000. Grant was, however, quite reckless of life. He had the advantage in point of numbers, and was prepared if necessary to rely upon a war of attrition to give him the ultimate victory. Judging that the process would take time, Evelyn Baring decided, after a month spent in the battle zone, to continue his travels, and left for Canada. It was not until after his departure that General Sherman made his advance from Atlanta that brought the war to a close.

Fired with the ambition to shoot a moose, Baring secured the services of two Indians and from Fredericton, in New Brunswick, pushed up the Miramichi river through dense forest in search of his quarry. The expedition was not wholly successful. An accident with an axe when cutting firewood immobilized him for more than a week, and the only shot which he actually fired at a bull moose was unsuccessful. But the experience was, nevertheless, enjoyable. The rich autumnal colouring of the maple and the birch woods, the flash of the *Aurora Borealis* across the canopy of the heavens,

and the solemn hush of the forest stretching league upon league in every direction, appealed powerfully to a mind sensitive at all times to the mystery of Nature. It was typical of him at this time that he should have carried with him into the solitude of the forest a selection of the literature for which he had developed so keen an appetite, and that during his enforced captivity while recovering from his accident he should have read "over and over again" *Hamlet* and the first six books of the *Iliad*.

The prospect of a return to the routine of regimental life – never an attractive one – can scarcely have been rendered more agreeable by experiences which had increased appreciably the range of his interests. Fortunately for young Baring, a further opportunity for employment of a more congenial nature presented itself immediately on his return to England at the end of 1864. Sir Henry Storks was appointed Governor and Commander-in-Chief at Malta, and to this new sphere of interest he carried with him two members of his former staff – George Strahan and Evelyn Baring. And here, as a Liberal with leanings, as has been pointed out, towards the more extreme form of Liberalism which was beginning to be labelled Radicalism, Evelyn Baring came into sharp contact with one of those problems which to the Liberal in his armchair, far from the scene of action, seem so easy of solution. The Maltese were a subject race; they had every claim to be well and justly governed. And from afar it might well appear, from the antics of those who claimed to speak for the Maltese people, that they were being neither well, nor justly, governed. At close quarters matters took on a different aspect. Opposition to Government in the small Legislative Council was palpably factious and unreasonable. And it was not long before Evelyn Baring, viewing matters with Liberal sympathies but with sturdy common sense, made a further discovery, namely, that "the few agitators who strutted on this miniature political stage represented very imperfectly

the views and true interests of the mass of the population." Moreover, here on the spot other considerations loomed large in the eyes of one who was not only a Liberal, but an Imperialist. The strategic importance of the island as a link in the chain stretching from Gibraltar eastwards could not be ignored, and Baring was not prepared to allow that naval and military considerations should be subordinated to futile attempts to conciliate a factious, an unrepresentative, and an irreconcilable Opposition. He admitted readily enough that the somewhat Draconian methods adopted by Sir Gaspard le Marchant, the previous Governor, in his dealings with the Opposition, if efficacious, had scarcely been judicious. Sir Gaspard's procedure had been simple. So soon as any of the critics of the Government rose in the Legislative Council to oppose a measure, he rang the division bell, explaining that, if there was any difference of opinion, a vote must be taken. Since there was a permanent official majority on the Council, this brought matters to a close. Sir Henry Storks's attempts to carry the Maltese with him seemed to Evelyn Baring to be altogether admirable, and he rejoiced at such success in this direction as was achieved; but when the Maltese refused to be reasonable there was nothing for it but for the Governor to assert the authority which he possessed. And when, many years afterwards, the then Governor, Lord Grenfell, adopted measures "for freeing the British Government from the somewhat excessive burthen" of the agitator's yoke, he did so with the complete approval of the then British Agent in Egypt.

Evelyn Baring had been less than a year in Malta when Sir Henry Storks received, and accepted, an invitation from the Government to preside over a Commission to inquire into the circumstances connected with the suppression of an outbreak in Jamaica. Arrangements for proceeding to London were made with commendable promptitude. The telegram submitting the invitation



was deciphered at 8 a.m., and by 3 p.m. on the same day Sir Henry Storks and his staff were steaming out of the harbour of Valetta.

The Jamaica inquiry provided Evelyn Baring with another illustration of the kind of problems which confront those whose lot it is to exercise authority over subject races. Jamaica had fallen on evil days. The abolition of slavery by Great Britain, and the admission into the United Kingdom of slave-grown sugar from elsewhere on the same terms as that cultivated by free labour, had inflicted a severe blow upon the chief industry of the colony. The better class colonists, despairing of the future, had left the island. The poorer whites who had remained had succumbed to the enervating effects of the climate and the local stimulant, a potent mixture of rum and lime-juice called sangaree, and had degenerated physically and mentally. They were ill fitted consequently to deal with the negro population, which was by temperament idle and of a low moral and intellectual standard. Though nominally Christians, they were pagans at heart and cared little for the ethical code of the religion that they professed. It was said that 90 per cent. of their children were born out of wedlock; and in times of difficulty it was to the obeah man rather than to the pastor of the flock that they took their troubles. No oath was sacred to them, as the Commissioners soon discovered, witness after witness being proved guilty of the grossest perjury. Baring's own estimate of their intellectual attainments was that two centuries of British rule in Jamaica had produced no negro of an intellectual standard which, at its maximum point, could be classed higher than that of a somewhat ill-informed village schoolmaster. At the same time, they had acquired just that superficial acquaintance with the shibboleths of Western political thought and practice which can be so irritating to the member of the governing race. In the course of the inquiry a witness made mention of the proceedings at

a meeting held, prior to the outbreak, in the hut of a negro called Clive. "Well, what did Mr. Clive do then?" asked one of the Commissioners. "What Massa Clive do, sar?" replied the half-naked witness; "Massa Clive move de previous question."

When all these circumstances are borne in mind, it is easy to believe that when an agrarian outbreak, which resulted in the brutal massacre of a number of Europeans, took place, the white population clamoured for drastic action. To the Commission the facts were clear enough. They never doubted that the original declaration of martial law was justified; but they were equally satisfied that the civil authorities were far too slow in re-asserting themselves, and that, whether under stress of panic or from motives of revenge, the action of the military was accompanied by deeds of excessive and unjustifiable severity. The case was complicated by the fact that there were strong religious differences between the Governor, Mr. Eyre, an ardent adherent of the Church of England, and the religious leaders of the black population, who were either Baptists or members of other Nonconformist denominations. The point was not lost on Evelyn Baring. "In many respects," he noted down, "Mr. Eyre was a very fine character; . . . but he possessed no special knowledge of West Indian affairs and there was one feature in his character (his outspoken championship of the Church of England) which of itself should have been sufficient to debar his nomination to the post which he then held."

## CHAPTER IV

### ARMY REFORM

TOWARDS the close of the year 1866, Sir Henry Storks accepted an invitation to fill a post newly created at the War Office with the title of Surveyor-General, and Evelyn Baring was obliged to return to England to resume regimental duty. The short spell of service which he put in at the Artillery Depot at Warley, in Essex, was not without its educative value. He was by tradition and by conviction opposed to anything of the nature of conscription, for he regarded the spirit of militarism bred by compulsory military service in other countries as an evil, and although, with his tolerant mind, he was always ready to consider the possibility of an evil being a necessity, he thought that in this particular case our insular position obviated any such necessity. But he was profoundly impressed by the almost magical transformation effected by good food, cleanliness, discipline, and physical training in the miserable material – “the out-scourings of the big towns,” as it seemed to him – from which the army was recruited; and he made up his mind that the ideal to aim at was a short course of physical training which, though not necessarily wholly military, might include the handling of a rifle, to be included as a compulsory subject in the education of all classes of the population.

But he found regimental duty in England after his experiences of a life with wider interests, not only uncongenial, but little calculated to assist him towards satisfying what was still the main ambition of his life – to marry Miss Ethel Errington. And, failing further employment of a special character, he decided to become a candidate for the Staff College. His preparation for

this venture consisted in the main of a few weeks of concentrated work with a French crammer named Lendy ; yet when, at the end of the year, he went up for the examination, he took second place in a list of eighteen or twenty candidates, and early in 1868 was admitted to the Staff College. The two years which he spent there, if uneventful, were at least fruitful in that they strengthened the habits of application which he had already acquired ; and encouraged by the lecturer on military history, a Major Adams, " a very able and distinguished officer who had served in the Austrian army and had taken part in Radetzky's Italian campaign of 1848," he turned his mind from the mere acquisition of knowledge to the presentation of it to others ; for it was at Adams' suggestion that he eventually published a small volume entitled *Staff College Essays*, containing disquisitions on the campaigns the study of which had formed part of the course of instruction at the college.

Towards the close of the year 1869, Evelyn Baring passed out of the Staff College at the head of the list, and, after a short spell of duty with a cavalry regiment at Aldershot, was appointed to the Topographical and Statistical Department at the War Office – the germ out of which the Intelligence Branch subsequently grew.

He joined his new post at a time of considerable interest. One of the chief functions of the Topographical Department was the collection of information about foreign armies ; and at the beginning of 1870 all eyes were fixed upon the impending struggle between France and Germany. With characteristic independence of judgment, the new recruit to the Department threw himself against the weight of military opinion in England which counted on the victory of the French. In 1866, the superior authorities of the British army had predicted a victory for the Austrians over the Prussians ; and there was no inherent improbability in their proving false prophets again. But Evelyn Baring had better grounds for his opinion than this. He knew something

of the condition of the French army and he had made a careful study of the Prussian military machine. Before a shot was fired he foretold a great battle in the neighbourhood of Châlons in which the French troops would be defeated, and after which the Prussian army would occupy Paris. Except that the decisive battle was fought at Sedan and not at Châlons, this forecast proved extraordinarily accurate and the prophet was legitimately proud of his success – “I have so often made incorrect forecasts of what was about to happen,” he wrote with characteristic modesty at a later date, “that I do not mind taking credit for having been a true prophet on this occasion.”

He was now in his thirtieth year, alert, capable, vigorous, and of indubitably sound judgment – the sort of man who in a Government Department was clearly able to render service of the utmost value to his superiors, provided that they themselves were men of vision who were willing and able to lift their work out of the rut of traditional routine. The times, indeed, were such as to demand men of vision and initiative. Early in November 1870, Lord Granville received a copy of Prince Gortschakoff’s famous circular repudiating the clauses of the Treaty of 1856 respecting the Black Sea; and the possibility of war between Great Britain and Russia at once flashed into the kaleidoscope of European politics. To Evelyn Baring fell the task of preparing appreciations of both the Russian and the Turkish armies. And since recent events had borne striking testimony to the efficacy of the German military machine, he undertook, at Mr. Cardwell’s request, a comprehensive study of the organization and methods of the German army. This labour led to others, and in quick succession he drew up rules adapting the German “war game” to the organization of the British army, and published an abridged translation of *The Elementary Tactics of the Prussian Infantry* and a full translation of the Prussian regulations for the conduct of peace

manœuvres. And when in 1871 it was decided for the first time to carry out peace manœuvres in England, Baring was chosen to act as secretary to the Commission which was appointed, under the chairmanship of Lord Eversley, to arrange matters as between the military and the civilian population.

His conduct of affairs in this capacity showed that he possessed hitherto unsuspected powers in the management of men. To dispel the alarm which had been created in the minds of landlords and farmers, Baring rode over the country explaining the nature of the operations. He was armed with a discretionary power to add to the Commission, and, whenever he came across a small proprietor inclined to make difficulties, he asked him to become a member. It was a course which he frequently adopted in similar circumstances throughout his career. "Nothing," he once observed, "calms opposition so much as to take an opponent into council, and, if possible, render him to some extent responsible for the action to which he is inclined to object."

But all these activities were only incidental to the much larger question of army reform which had been forced on to the forefront of the political stage by events on the Continent. There was little doubt that the public demanded reform. In August, £2,000,000 had been voted to increase the army by 20,000 men; but persons with vision, like Mr. Cardwell, then Secretary of State for War, knew well that no increase in numbers was likely to be of any avail so long as the army itself was organized on antiquated lines and its personnel subject to demoralizing influences. The fierce controversies which raged around the army in the early 'seventies are of academic interest only, to a generation which has passed through the fiery furnace of the greatest war known to history. From the hither shore of that stupendous cataclysm the alarms and excursions of 1870 are dwarfed into insignificance. The debates seem petty; the issues puerile. It is, indeed, with feelings almost of

incredulity that we read of a system under which, as often as not, the pay which an officer received was less than the interest on the sums which he had invested in purchasing his Commission and subsequent promotion ; under which it was possible for a young man of wealth, by the simple expedient of purchasing the retirement of all the officers senior to him, to acquire high command, irrespective of his professional qualifications or of experience ; and under which – since the capital invested in purchasing a Commission lapsed on an officer becoming a general – a premium was placed upon early retirement from the army, which, in its turn, had the doubtful advantage, even from the point of view of the State, of relieving it of any obligation to reward its servants with a pension. And from the superior heights of our own wisdom and experience we may smile at such arguments against the abolition of the system as those employed by Whig statesmen of the standing of Lord Grey, that to do away with the practice would be to bring into existence a professional military caste which might “ become a source of danger to the political liberty of the country.” What is of chief interest from the point of view from which I am now writing is not so much the nature of the arguments or the merits of the issues, as the fact that it was a young artillery officer behind the scenes who played a powerful part in bringing about the downfall of a system which had been upheld by Palmerston and which, as a famous quarterly<sup>1</sup> insisted, had been supported by the Whig Party for 170 years. He it was who provided the Parliamentary advocates of change with ammunition to fight their battles. And into the attack against the Purchase System in particular he threw himself with an almost passionate enthusiasm derived from his professional conviction that in its abolition lay “ the keystone of army reform.”<sup>2</sup> The attitude which he assumed called for considerable moral courage, for, however

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Review*.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase occurs in a lengthy memorandum entitled *The Arguments For and Against the Purchase System*, written by Baring for his official chiefs.

absurd and indefensible the system may appear to-day, it was, in the 'seventies, deeply entrenched and stubbornly defended. In the whole of the army itself, a handful of officers only, conspicuous among whom were Sir G., afterwards Lord, Wolseley and Sir George Colley, was found willing to dissent from the views against change known to be held by the Commander-in-Chief. "Sir Garnet Wolseley has not disappointed me," Lord Beaconsfield wrote a little later. "Nothing can give you an idea of the jealousy, hatred, and all uncharitableness of the Horse Guards against our only soldier."<sup>1</sup>

With all his remarkable knowledge of military detail it is doubtful if the Duke of Cambridge possessed any great grasp of the larger aspects of military policy. He was by nature intensely conservative and was wedded to the system in which he himself had been brought up. His opposition to the abolition of the Purchase System was well known in every messroom throughout the kingdom ; and he was only deterred from giving expression to his real feelings on the floor of the House of Lords by an intimation from Mr. Gladstone that overt opposition to the Government would involve resignation of his office. And Evelyn Baring well knew that by pitting himself against the opinions and prejudices of the whole hierarchy of his superior officers he was putting to the hazard all prospects of any early military advancement. This much was in his favour, that his relative, Lord Northbrook, was Under Secretary of State for War ; and, encouraged by his sympathy, he plunged headlong into the fray. The plea of the Whigs stood self-condemned in light of European actualities. In view of the rapidity of modern warfare, it was neither wise nor safe to keep officers inefficient in order that they should be harmless. It was preposterous that by spending £30,000 in purchasing the retirement of all the officers senior to him, a young cadet<sup>2</sup> should have obtained, at an absurdly immature age, the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lady Bradford, December 26th, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Cardigan.



command of a famous cavalry regiment. That the cost of reform would be great he did not deny ; but control of the army must vest in the State, and it was essential that the State should shoulder what was clearly a primary obligation. The time had come, in the words of the reformers of the day, for the State "to buy back the army from its own officers."

Baring had certainly crossed the Rubicon ; and it is impossible to say what the effect of his action would have been on his own future had it not been for one of those accidents which, as he had already more than once observed, seem unexpectedly to deflect the whole course of an individual's career. In the spring of 1872 Lord Mayo was struck down by the hand of an assassin, and Lord Northbrook was offered, and accepted, the appointment of Viceroy of India in his stead. Looking round in search of someone on whose judgment he could rely to take charge of his personal staff, his gaze fell not unnaturally upon the brilliant young officer who had proved so efficient an assistant in his parliamentary battles and who was attached to him by ties not only of sympathy, but of blood. Baring, who had now definitely decided that neither by temperament nor by habits of thought was he particularly suited for a military career, jumped at the opportunity which was thus offered him of exchanging military for civil employment, and when Lord Northbrook sailed he accompanied him as his private secretary. With this appointment his military career may be said to have come to an end. It is true that in 1876 he returned temporarily to the War Office ; but he did so reluctantly and for a few months only. And, generally speaking, it is true to say that from 1872 onwards his work in life lay outside the United Kingdom and in other spheres — those of finance, diplomacy, and civil administration.

## CHAPTER V

### WITH NORTHBROOK IN INDIA

THE four years spent in India as private secretary to Lord Northbrook were of extraordinary value in fitting Evelyn Baring for the work which Destiny had in store for him. In the first place, he was serving a chief for whose character he entertained feelings of the deepest admiration, and with whose outlook he was in complete sympathy. He was not blind to certain disabilities which militated against Lord Northbrook ever attaining to the first rank in English public life. He was an indifferent public speaker; and a certain lack of knowledge of the world, due to his own innate simplicity of character, sometimes rendered him faulty in his judgments of men. But he was a man of the highest integrity, who was incapable in any public act of being swayed by any sort of personal consideration. Evelyn Baring himself, when speaking of him, quoted a saying of Father Strickland from the diary of Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff: "One may do a great deal of good in this world, if one does not care who gets the credit for it"; and added, "I have come across very few people in the course of my public career who have really acted on this principle. It is one from which Lord Northbrook never departed." Since the Viceroy never himself expected praise for doing his duty, he was usually sparing in his praise of others; but he inspired feelings of deep affection in those who were admitted to his intimacy, and of respect in all who came into contact with him. And since he was wholly indifferent to praise or blame he was capable of resisting with adamant strength, pressure brought to bear upon him, whether by his official superiors or by agitation in the Press. With commendable impartiality he resisted

the exhortations of the Duke of Argyll, Secretary of State for India in Mr. Gladstone's Administration, to prohibit the export of rice as a means of fighting the famine which visited the northern provinces of Bengal in 1874; and similar pressure from Lord Salisbury, who had become Secretary of State for India in Disraeli's Ministry, to remit the Indian import duty levied on Manchester piece goods. In the former case, official authority was supported by a violent Press campaign both in Great Britain and in India. "Against this storm of entreaty and obloquy," his private secretary wrote, "Lord Northbrook stood as firm as a rock." He did so because he was satisfied that both the causes and the nature of the famine were misunderstood; and subsequent events proved the soundness of his view. In the latter case all his sympathies were in favour of the course which was urged upon him, for all tariffs were obnoxious to his strong free trade views. But in the case of the Indian cotton duty the revenue which it produced could not be spared, while its abolition would be regarded in India as a cynical subordination of the interests of India to those of Lancashire. It may be remarked in passing that it fell to the lot of Evelyn Baring himself to grasp this nettle when, some years later, he became Financial Member in the Government of India during Lord Ripon's Viceroyalty. Differences of opinion between Lord Northbrook and Disraeli's Government were not confined to the fiscal issue; they became acute over Afghanistan, with the result that he resigned the Viceroyalty at the close of his fourth year of office.

Such a chief Evelyn Baring served with whole-hearted enthusiasm. The novelty and variety of the subjects which came before him fascinated him. The mass of memoranda which he wrote on political, military, financial, and administrative affairs testifies to the thoroughness with which he threw himself into a study of the vast complexities of Indian administration. Side by side with the ruling ambition of his life—that of

making marriage with Ethel Errington possible – is now perceptible a twin ambition – that of making a name for himself in the service of his country. It was one of his convictions that it was necessary to work extremely hard to obtain advancement in any career in life. “I do not think that in the course of my life,” he once wrote, “I remember a single instance, certainly not one amongst politicians or officials, of anyone who, relying on mere natural talent, attained a position of any real distinction without very hard work. Duty and the primrose path of pleasure *ne se marient pas*, as the French would say.” And he acted religiously on this conviction. He rose at six in the morning, and with the exception of two hours a day which he devoted to exercise he worked until 8 p.m. Though as keen as ever upon sport, he gave up all idea of shooting. The two brief holidays which he took during these four years – neither extending beyond three weeks – he spent travelling in the hills beyond Simla, crossing on one occasion the Manirung Pass, one of the highest passes in the Himalaya Mountains, and penetrating to the neighbourhood of the Chinese frontier.

A sobriquet often provides a reliable clue to a man's character or ability. In Calcutta and Simla, Evelyn Baring was known as “the Vice-Viceroy.” Lord Northbrook appreciated to the full the value of his private secretary. He encouraged him to play the part of Creon's son.<sup>1</sup> And he benefited greatly from the friendly criticism which he invited behind the scenes. Evelyn Baring benefited no less; for it caused him to form opinions of his own on all manner of subjects. It taught him, too, the value of such a practice – a lesson which he took to heart when, in his turn, he found himself

<sup>1</sup> See Creon's son's remonstrance with his father on the sentence passed on Antigone:

“For your interest, then, I have been accustomed to consider everything that anyone says or does, or has to blame; for your eye terrifies a common

citizen from using those words which you would not be pleased to hear;

“but I in the shade hear them.” – *Soph. Ant.* 688.

The comparison, needless to say, was Evelyn Baring's own.

in a position of authority faced with the task of coming to decisions on difficult and controversial questions.

Lord Northbrook's attitude towards the Indian peasantry was not lost on his private secretary. The Viceroy's sympathy with them in their daily struggle for existence was genuine and profound. Economy in expenditure and a rigid determination to keep taxation low were the keynotes of his Indian policy. Proposals which savoured in the smallest degree of a policy of adventure beyond the frontier were frowned on; hence his differences with Disraeli's Ministry. There is no doubt that it was during these four years that were planted in Evelyn Baring's heart the seeds of sympathy with the toiling masses of a subject people, which played so large a part in determining his attitude when, later on, he was placed in a position of authority in Egypt. But though the chain of cause and effect had already been set in motion, and the man who in due time was to be responsible for launching Evelyn Baring on his Egyptian career was even now becoming acquainted with him and sizing up his ability and character,<sup>1</sup> the curtain had not yet lifted on the stage on which he was destined to play so great a part. No hint of his future career had so far reached him. On his departure from India in the early summer of 1876, it was his intention to settle in England. And before he had been back for many days, he had bought a house in London. A variety of circumstances had brought the accomplishment of the main ambition of his life within reach. An economical standard of living in India had enabled him to save a little money. This had been augmented as a result of the death of his mother in the autumn of 1874. The death of Sir Rowland Errington about the same time had left his daughters with small incomes of their own; and on June the 28th, 1876, Evelyn Baring, now thirty-five years of age, was married to Ethel Stanley Errington,

<sup>1</sup> Sir Louis Mallet, Under Secretary of State at the India Office, who visited India towards the close of Lord Northbrook's Viceroyalty in connection with the proposed abolition of the cotton duties.

to whom he had plighted his troth fourteen years before. While a devout Catholic herself, Ethel Errington was in full sympathy with her future husband's views on the difficult question of mixed marriages. Of those views there was never any doubt ; they had been concisely stated by Lecky in his history of European morals : " Mixed marriages, it has been truly said, may do more than almost any other influence to assuage the rancour and the asperity of sects, and they have, therefore, always been bitterly opposed by theologians." To Evelyn Baring it seemed that Archbishop Manning was a theologian to whom Mr. Lecky's stricture was especially applicable ; for it was at his door that he laid the responsibility for the strict conditions recently laid down by the Vatican before approval of marriage with a Protestant would be accorded by the Catholic Church. The condition to which Evelyn Baring took particular exception was that which required that all the children of the marriage should be brought up as Catholics. And since Ethel Errington agreed with him that the upbringing of children was a matter solely for their parents, the marriage took place in a Protestant church only, and the two boys born of the marriage were brought up in the Protestant faith.

In July, Captain Baring returned to the Topographical Department of the War Office ; but he remained there for six months only, for by the beginning of 1877, Fate was pointing the road along which henceforth he was to travel. In 1863 Said Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt, had died, leaving the country with a modest public debt of something less than three and a half million sterling. He was succeeded by Ismail Pasha, son of the celebrated Ibrahim Pasha – the " Abraham Parker " of the London crowd, whose procession through the streets of the metropolis in the 'forties had left so deep an impress upon little Baring's mind. The succession had momentous consequences, for it ushered in an era of national profligacy which in the end led to drastic action

on the part of the European Powers chiefly interested. The road to ruin which Ismail Pasha had travelled had been a rapid one. For thirteen years he had added, on the average, a sum of £7,000,000 annually to the debt of Egypt, with the result that by the summer of 1876 the modest public debt to which he had succeeded had risen from £3,293,000 to £91,000,000. Of this formidable sum, the £16,000,000, spent on the Suez Canal was the only portion for which assets of any value could be shown; the balance, as Captain Baring was shortly to discover, had been squandered. It was in these circumstances that in May 1876 a Khedivial Decree was issued, instituting a Commission of the Public Debt. Though Great Britain's financial stake in the country was a large one, Lord Derby, at that time Foreign Minister, was unwilling to interfere in the internal affairs of Egypt, and declined to nominate a British Commissioner to join the representatives of Austria, France, and Italy, though he raised no objection to a mission undertaken by Mr., afterwards Lord, Goschen on behalf of the bondholders, in the autumn of that year. In face of the continued refusal of the British Government to appoint an English representative to the Commission, the Khedive applied to Mr. Goschen. Mr. Goschen turned to Sir Louis Mallet for advice, and the latter, mindful of his experience of Lord Northbrook's private secretary in India, recommended him strongly for the post. To Captain Baring, chafing at employment in the Topographical Department of the War Office, the offer of important work in Egypt on a salary of £3,000 a year seemed almost too good to be true. He gave up his employment, and by March 1877 was in Cairo. Yet even now his future career hung in the balance. Mrs. Baring was unwell, the heat was excessive, and the discomfort of life in Cairo for an English lady in bad health was very great. Before he had been a month in the country he was thinking seriously of resigning his post and returning to England. It was Mrs. Baring who, by refusing to

countenance any such idea, was responsible for the career of a great Englishman, built up patiently year after year on the banks of that river which, in the words of Leigh Hunt,

*Flows through old hushed Egypt and its sands  
Like some great mighty thought, threading a dream ;*

and, incidentally, for the predominant part played by Great Britain in the making of modern Egypt. In August 1878 Captain Baring was granted the rank of Major ; but he had now definitely decided on a civil career, and when, in 1879, special terms were offered in order to induce officers of the artillery to retire and so relieve the block of promotion, he accepted a gratuity of £2,000, and finally severed his connection with the army.



## CHAPTER VI

### COMMISSIONER OF THE DEBT

THE principal duty devolving upon the Commissioners of the Public Debt when Major Baring reached Cairo in March 1877 was to see that effect was given to the financial settlement of November the 18th, 1876, negotiated by Mr. Goschen and M. Joubert on behalf of the bondholders with the Government of the Khedive. And Evelyn Baring took up his quarters at Ramleh, a suburb of Alexandria, where he spent the summer familiarizing himself with the complexities of Egyptian finance. He was not long in discovering that a very imperfect light had been thrown on the obscurities of the very involved financial situation which Mr. Goschen and M. Joubert had attempted to straighten out. It had always been evident that they had been handicapped in the performance of their task by the inadequacy of the data on which they had been obliged to work. And it now became clear that the data which had been supplied had been not only inadequate, but hopelessly incorrect. The State debt had been successfully funded, and specific revenues had been assigned to its service; but a very brief experience of the working of the arrangement which had been come to was sufficient to show that the revenues which had been pledged fell short of the charges which they were assigned to meet. During the twelve months ending in July 1877, sources of revenue which Mr. Goschen had been assured would bring in £4,800,000, a year had actually produced only £3,328,000.

This was not the only disturbing discovery that Evelyn Baring was to make. Careful inquiries showed that the real indebtedness of the Egyptian Government did not end with the ninety odd millions of the consolidated debt.

Other large outstanding claims against them came gradually to light. The pay of their own employees was found to be heavily in arrears, the amount due under this head alone being estimated by Baring at the close of 1877 to be not less than £500,000. Considerable sums were also due in respect of the unfinished harbour works at Alexandria, and other sums of varying and, in some cases, of very large amounts, into the details of which it is not necessary to enter, were found to be owing to sundry creditors. The net result of his inquiries into this aspect of the financial puzzle was to satisfy him that, over and above the consolidated debt, the Government was saddled with liabilities amounting to not less than £11,500,000. But even these discoveries, though they shed illuminating light upon some of the obscurities in which the true state of the country's finances was shrouded, did not dispel the mystery in which the operations of the Egyptian Treasury under the tortuous and profligate manipulation of Ismail Pasha were enveloped. A whole hierarchy of tax collectors was employed in exacting from the *fellahin* all but a mere pittance of the wealth which they produced by their cultivation of the soil; and that large payments were made into the Treasury was beyond dispute. Yet when bills had to be met and debts discharged, the till was almost invariably empty. The stream of gold which flowed into the coffers of the Khedive disappeared in much the same way as do the waters of the Helmund river in the thirsty hamuns of Sistan. What happened to it after it had reached its destination? That was a question to which Baring was unable to provide an answer.

It so happened that unusually large sums of money had been paid into the Treasury during the year 1876 – £4,000,000, in satisfaction of Disraeli's dramatic acquisition of the Suez Canal Shares, and an advance of £5,000,000, made by the French in addition to the ordinary revenue of the year. Disraeli himself had imagined that his purchase of the Khedive's shares in the Suez

Canal would stave off the latter's impending bankruptcy. "The news is good from Egypt," he had written in the spring of 1876. "Gladstone said, the other day, the Khedive would be bankrupt in three weeks. . . . I shall be surprised if Suez Canal shares and Mr. Cave's mission do not lead to his salvation. . . ." Yet as Mr. Vivian, then British Consul-General, reported, by the end of the same year the Treasury was empty, payment of the coupon of the unified debt had been deferred, the servants of the State were in arrears of pay, and heavy debts remained unsettled. Matters went from bad to worse, and, to add to the difficulties of the situation, a low Nile during the year, followed inevitably by a famine, reduced the means and added to the misery of the unfortunate people. Even the salaries of the Commissioners themselves remained unpaid. "There was a report this morning," Baring wrote in a letter to Mr. Goschen on December the 31st, 1877, "that the Government were going to pay us some part of what they owe us. We are owed pay from July 21st - £1,250 each. We all said, 'C'est très invraisemblable,' and, in fact, it turned out to be without foundation."

To Evelyn Baring pondering upon these matters two things gradually became apparent, first that the Goschen-Joubert settlement of 1876 would have to be modified, and secondly, that before any settlement for which a reasonable degree of permanence could be predicated was possible, an impartial and exhaustive inquiry into the facts of the financial situation would have to be undertaken. When Hercules set about cleansing the stables of the King of Elis, he at least knew the precise nature of the mess that had to be cleared up; those charged with the task of setting the Egyptian financial house in order were not so fortunate. And as a preliminary step, accompanied by Baron de Malaret, who held the post of Controller-General of expenditure under the Goschen-Joubert agreement, Baring proceeded to Paris and London

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lady Bradford, dated March 2nd, 1876.

to discuss matters with M. Joubert and Mr. Goschen. The mission was completely satisfactory, and Baring returned to Egypt in October prepared to consider a modification of the terms of the Goschen-Joubert settlement ; but only as a result of a full inquiry into the whole financial situation.

It was not altogether surprising that with the first of these two propositions the Khedive should readily agree, since it was obvious that any modification must be in his favour ; but from the second he violently dissented. He was willing enough to accept an inquiry limited to the revenue of the country, since he had little doubt that the result of such an investigation could be made to show good cause for a reduction of the rate of interest on the public debt which, with 1 per cent. for the sinking fund, had been fixed under the Goschen-Joubert settlement at 7 per cent. But to any inquiry into expenditure he was strenuously opposed. And, in the hope of cutting the ground from under the Commissioners' feet, he went so far early in 1878 as to issue a decree instituting an inquiry into the revenue of the country only, and to invite General Gordon, who, however great his abilities in other directions, had no knowledge of finance, to accept the Presidentship of a Commission to be formed to undertake the work. Against acceptance of any such compromise Evelyn Baring opposed a will of adamant ; and it was due in no small measure to the firmness and ability which he displayed that the resistance of the Khedive was eventually overcome. On April the 4th, 1878, a Commission of Inquiry with M. de Lesseps as President, Sir Rivers Wilson and Riaz Pasha as Vice-Presidents, and the four Commissioners of the Debt as members, was appointed under the authority of a Khedivial decree.

This was the first definite step forward in the process of the regeneration of Egypt in which Evelyn Baring played from the first an important, and later a predominant, part. Success was won, as has been said, only after a strenuous struggle against the sustained

and stiff-necked opposition of the Khedive. It was the first real test of those latent qualities which Evelyn Baring possessed, and which were to raise him to the first rank of those whose disinterested patriotism and spirit of service have made of the Imperial might of Britain an instrument for the service of mankind ; for, as will be seen as the story of his life and work unfolds, it was not attachment to the interests of the bondholders, but compassion for the downtrodden people of the Nile valley, that led him to give his life to Egypt. And it is worth while to examine, in rather greater detail than has been done by Lord Cromer himself in his published works, the successive steps in the struggle to which reference has been made.

In his story of *Modern Egypt* Lord Cromer disposes in three or four paragraphs of the fight which he waged in the interval between the formal demand for an inquiry put forward by the Commissioners of the Debt on January the 9th, 1878, and the capitulation of the Khedive on April the 4th. A perusal of his unpublished correspondence not only brings to light the magnitude of the difficulties with which he had to cope and the predominant part which he himself played in securing the eventual victory, but makes it clear that many of the obstacles need never have arisen if only the British Government could have been persuaded to interest themselves a little more actively in the affairs of Egypt. In his letters to Mr. Goschen, Baring was constantly urging this. " My own opinion is," he wrote on March the 8th, " that by the display of a little energy, English influence might be much strengthened and the whole thing put straight without any serious political disturbance." With a more ample knowledge of them, he would possibly have made greater allowance for the difficulties with which the Prime Minister in England was contending in his endeavours to uphold Turkey against Russia and to patch the cracks which were threatening his Cabinet with disaster. We now know that while Baring was pressing

the claims of Egypt upon the attention of the Government, Disraeli was himself depicting with a graphic if overwrought pen, the overwhelming nature of his own preoccupations elsewhere. "I have had many terrible days, but none like this," he wrote on January the 15th; "... the confusion is so great that it seems the end of the world"; and a few days later: "I fear I have nothing to divert your gloom, for under this roof there is nothing but labour, anxiety, and care – and daily Cabinets."<sup>1</sup> In these circumstances it is little surprising that Baring in Egypt was left for the most part to play a lone hand.

The deafness of the Government to his entreaties was none the less a serious handicap, and to this initial disadvantage were added local difficulties of no mean order due in part to the inherent complexities of the case, and in part to the personalities of the chief actors who figured in the drama. Mr. Romaine, the English Controller-General of Revenue appointed under the terms of the Goschen-Joubert settlement, scarcely possessed the special qualifications required to enable him to avoid the pitfalls with which a particularly difficult post was hedged around. He was lacking in the critical faculty, and accepted without question all that he was told by those engaged in the collection of the taxes. By his insistence on the inadequacy of the revenue to meet the interest on the Public Debt, he played constantly into the hands of the Khedive and encouraged him in his belief that if he remained obdurate he could secure an arbitrary reduction in the rate of interest without the hated inquiry into his expenditure which the Commissioners were demanding. "Romaine's extreme simplicity," Baring wrote on perusing his report on the revenues of the country, "really disarms criticism. The only check he had on the statements of the various Moudirs<sup>2</sup> whom he examined, was that *he put each on his*

<sup>1</sup> Letters to Lady Bradford.

<sup>2</sup> Provincial Governors.

*word of honour as a gentleman to tell the truth!* I know that the Khedive is immensely tickled with this story and tells it to his familiars as a capital joke.”<sup>1</sup> When he was informed that the Controller-General had submitted a project to the Khedive involving a reduction of the rate of interest on the Public Debt by half, he was less charitable in his estimate of him – “he is a dangerous lunatic,” he told Mr. Goschen, “and should be locked up.” Neither did the attitude of the French help to smooth difficulties from his path. Baring entertained no kindlier feelings towards the Khedive than did the French; but he realized the importance of extreme tact in dealing with him if his violent hostility towards the Commissioners was ever to be overcome and his agreement to an adequate inquiry obtained. Not so the French, who held the view that Egypt could pay, and ought to be made to pay, and who, to say the least of it, were but lukewarm in their support of an inquiry. The French Consul-General in particular held strong views on the question, and expressed them with violence and with a cynical disregard for the consequences of his words. Infinite tact and good temper were demanded consequently if the French and British were to maintain an unbroken front in face of the hostility and provocation of the Khedive; and it was fortunate for Baring that in the French Commissioner of the Debt he had a colleague who worked loyally with him. M. de Blignières, who necessarily shared to some extent the views of his compatriots, was not always discreet in his utterances; but he was open to argument, and he shared Baring’s view of the importance of maintaining an Anglo-French *entente*. When in Baring’s opinion it had become necessary for the Commissioners to address to the Khedive a strong official letter on the subject of an inquiry, he behaved extremely well, as, indeed, he always did when definite action was required. “He was averse to writing it at all,” Baring mentioned in a letter to Mr. Goschen,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. Goschen, February 2nd, 1878.

“ but yielded to my opinion on the subject. He accepted all my arguments, and, in the matter of composition, cheerfully abandoned his most pungent and epigrammatic phrases.”<sup>1</sup>

Finally there were constant embarrassments resulting from uninstructed criticism in the English and French Press, which did little enough to smooth the path of Anglo-French co-operation. “ The newspapers are rather maddening,” Baring wrote, on one occasion. “ If you tell them nothing they invent ; if you tell them the truth they use it indiscreetly.”

Exceptional qualities, clearly, were required if the English Commissioner, alone among his colleagues in not being the nominee of his Government, was to steer clear of the difficulties which beset his path and crown his labours with success : sound judgment and a capacity for arriving at, and adhering to, decisions ; unfailing tact in dealing both with his colleagues and with the Khedive ; infinite patience and an unruffled temper in face of factious opposition and exasperating delay ; courage, firmness, and determination in fighting, in the absence even of the moral support of his own Government, the paralysing inertia which clogs and hampers progress in all Eastern countries. To claim for Evelyn Baring these many virtues is to place him high among the admirable Crichtons of this world ; yet a dispassionate consideration of the part which he played in the events which are being described leads to the conclusion that the claim is a justifiable one.

Baring's first definite proposal for the active intervention of the British Government was in connection with the unfunded debts which his investigations had brought to light, and was embodied in a confidential Memorandum which he drew up in December 1877. Looked at from a purely financial point of view, there can be little doubt that the scheme which he put forward would have rendered comparatively simple the solution of the

<sup>1</sup> Letter of January 11th, 1878.



problem with which it dealt. But it involved the active intervention of the British Government in the shape of a guarantee of the interest upon a new Egyptian State loan. Would they be prepared to give it? He did not think so, even though he had been encouraged to believe that they were a little more inclined than heretofore to listen to arguments in favour of taking a hand.

“Talking the other day with Vivian,” he told Mr. Goschen, in a letter dated December the 19th, “he said that he thought from the tone of the English Government that they were more disposed than heretofore to take an active part in putting things straight. I replied that if such was really the case it was quite within their power to afford immense assistance, and that a *deus ex machina* in the shape of a guaranteed loan would, indeed, speedily alter the aspect of affairs. . . . I am afraid, however, that you will rather laugh at my gaudiose project, which is, in fact, pretty sure to end in smoke; but there can, I imagine, be no harm in pointing out what immense powers the Government possess to disentangle the whole affair if they choose to exert them.”

He was not, therefore, surprised when in due course he was informed of the rejection of his scheme by the British Treasury. But he was surprised and considerably annoyed at the interpretation which the Treasury had apparently placed upon the wider implications of his Memorandum. “In a recent letter from the Treasury to the Foreign Office which has been communicated to Vivian on the subject of my Memorandum on a guaranteed loan,” he told Mr. Goschen, “they make some remarks which have rather annoyed me.”<sup>1</sup> The Treasury assumed, in fact, that the scheme embodied in the Memorandum represented the full extent of Baring’s contribution towards the solution of the financial and administrative difficulties of Egypt; that it was even put forward as a preferable alternative to the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry, and that, provided the

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 22nd, 1878.

guaranteed loan was agreed to, he was prepared to contemplate the existing vicious system of administration remaining unaltered. To these charges Baring replied in a letter to the British Consul-General:

“ I regret that I did not make it sufficiently clear  
 “ that one of the cardinal points of the scheme which  
 “ I sketched out was that the present system of ad-  
 “ ministration should *not* be maintained. What I  
 “ said was that the benefit conferred on the Khedive  
 “ by the guaranteeing Powers would be so great that  
 “ they would practically be able to dictate their own  
 “ terms; and I certainly supposed that it would be  
 “ inferred that those terms would be such as to ensure  
 “ an improved administration of the country. . . .  
 “ I fear that it must have been supposed that I wished  
 “ the guaranteed loan to take the place of the Com-  
 “ mission of Inquiry. . Such is very far from being the  
 “ case. I had a very large hand in initiating the idea  
 “ of an inquiry; for months past—long before the  
 “ Government took up the matter—I have been  
 “ incessantly labouring to bring one about . . . and  
 “ I need hardly tell you that I regarded the fullest  
 “ inquiry as an essential preliminary to granting a  
 “ guaranteed loan to the Khedive.”<sup>1</sup>

The claim that he had been labouring to bring about the Inquiry in which the British Government were now taking a tardy interest, was no idle one. In December 1877, the Khedive was scheming to obtain approval for the restricted inquiry that was all that he was prepared to allow.

“ I have been thinking quietly over the papers you  
 “ read to me this evening,” Baring told Mr. Vivian  
 “ on December the 23rd. “ . . . The conditions  
 “ under which the Khedive now invites us to take  
 “ part in the proposed inquiry are briefly these—  
 “ that we should confine ourselves entirely to examin-  
 “ ing the amount of the State revenue and the method  
 “ of collecting it. Without doubt this is a most  
 “ important branch of the inquiry, yet after care-  
 “ fully considering the matter it appears to me that

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 22nd, 1878.

“ there are grave, indeed, I fear insuperable objections  
 “ to our commencing any inquiry on this limited  
 “ basis.”

To the many reasons which made inquiry into the Government's expenditure necessary had now been added another. The Courts had recently decided in what was known as the Keller case that the pay of the Government employees was a first charge upon the State revenue, and a question had arisen whether this might not involve the sequestration of money already in the hands of the Commissioners of the Debt. The Court had no power to execute its judgments, and the French Commissioner was inclined to snap his fingers at any order which might be issued to the *Caisse*—“ ‘*flanquer l'huissier par la fenêtre,*’ as de Blignières says, chuckling withal at the idea of a real shindy.”<sup>1</sup> Fortunately no order was issued; but it was obvious that provision would have to be made in future, since if this was not done there would be nothing to prevent the Government from allowing further huge arrears of pay to accumulate, and then, with the sanction of the law, breaking faith with its creditors. And before such provision could be made, accurate knowledge of the amount due in respect of pay must be obtained.

From this view Baring never departed. The Commissioners, he explained, had no wish to interfere with the Khedive's legitimate rights—“ but we object to his making tools of us to deceive the world, as he is evidently endeavouring to do. I am getting angry at the way he is trifling with a serious position. . . . In spite of the deplorable alternative, I really think on every account it is better to have no inquiry and await the collapse that must come, rather than lend ourselves to a half-measure which cannot be productive of any real good.”<sup>2</sup>

The year closed in general gloom—“ The Khedive swore by the blood of his father, I am told, that he would

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Major Baring to Mr. Goschen, December 21st, 1877.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Mr. Goschen, December 24th, 1877.

not yield an inch, and we (the Commissioners) all swore by the blood of our collective eight parents that we would not give in." What, then, were the chances of a solution? Small enough; yet while there was any chance at all Baring refused to throw up the sponge:

"I do not utterly despair of coming to some arrangement, but really the difficulties of one sort or another are so great that I fear that the waters must shortly go over my head. If I once get to be thoroughly convinced that I can no longer do any good, I shall withdraw from a false position and shake the Egyptian dust from my feet."<sup>1</sup>

The opening weeks of the new year effected little improvement in a situation which was drifting towards an obvious crisis, since the Commissioners made it clear that there was a limit to their patience. "You will see that we have now thrown away the scabbards from our swords and are at open war," Baring wrote on February the 2nd; and a little later he again urged upon Mr. Goschen the danger which he foresaw if the British Government insisted on holding aloof. The French, he felt certain, would not consent to play the part of passive spectators at the crash which was assuredly coming. Would the British Government stand by with folded hands if the French stepped in? He imagined not. "I conclude, therefore, that a purely non-intervention policy on the part of the English Government will before long become quite impossible."<sup>2</sup> When Baring had written that they had thrown away the scabbards from their swords, he had in mind proceedings which the Commissioners had instituted against the Egyptian Minister of Finance. On March the 2nd the Court gave a verdict for the Commissioners, and encouraged by this success the Governments of Great Britain and France authorized their representatives to issue a warning to the Egyptian Government. Circumstances were at last

<sup>1</sup> Letter to J. Scott, Esq., December 30th, 1877.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated February 15th, 1878.

combining to break down the Khedive's opposition, and on March the 18th, Baring was able to announce the victory :

"I have only time to write a line. I am at the moment  
"more hopeful of arriving at an arrangement than  
"I have been at any previous moment. Old De  
"Lesseps came to see us this morning. He vows  
"that the Viceroy is prepared to give in, and only  
"asks us to let him write on our behalf a soothing  
"letter to the Government which is to be a beginning  
"of the negotiations. This we are going to let him  
"do. Our terms are :

"(1) Commission to consist of six members with  
equal powers.

"(2) Inquiry to extend to the whole financial  
position."

A week of negotiation followed, and on March the 25th he wrote :

"At last ! I really think that after five months of  
"incessant labour the inquiry is settled. . . . To myself  
"the conclusion is eminently satisfactory. We get  
"absolutely all for which we have been contending.  
"An inquiry into the whole financial situation with-  
"out limit, the admission of the whole *Caisse*, and of  
"an Englishman<sup>1</sup> of high character and ability."

There is no need to deal at any length with events in Egypt during the remainder of Baring's time as a Commissioner of the Debt, for they have been told in considerable detail in *Modern Egypt*. From the point of view of biography as distinct from history the chief interest lies in his attitude towards the problems with which he had now to deal rather than in the nature of the problems themselves. And from this point of view the outstanding feature is the rapid shifting of his own interest from the claims of the bondholders to the plight of the Egyptian people. "My duty," he wrote on

<sup>1</sup> Sir Rivers Wilson.

February the 8th, 1878, "is to do those things which the Decree says I ought to do. Nevertheless I consider the *fellah* quite as *interesting*, to use the French phrase, as the creditors – perhaps more so ; and if Romaine had set to work to ameliorate the *fellah's* lot in a reasonable way he would have had my cordial support."

As a member of the Commission of Inquiry he acquired much first-hand knowledge of the lot of the unfortunate peasantry under the rule of a vicious despot whom he was unable to credit even with those barbaric virtues which distinguished his cruel but capable grandfather and his savage, half-lunatic, but courageous father ; and his innate humanity was deeply stirred by the plenitude of their sufferings. From the first he was imbued with the idea that a far higher task awaited the British in Egypt than the mere protection of the interests of her foreign creditors ; and as the days wore on, and his knowledge of the true state of affairs increased, he devoted more and more time and thought to the problem of possible reforms. "I invented a theory," he noted in his unpublished Memoirs, "which was wholly novel at the time, and which I was able to get adopted by my French colleague, to the effect that the interests of the bondholders and taxpayers were identic. Both had one common enemy, namely, Ismail Pasha."

Starting from this principle, it was but one step forward in a logical chain of arguments to use the bondholding influence which had all the chanceries of Europe at its back to lighten the burdens and ameliorate the lot of the unfortunate blue-shirted peasantry of Egypt. It was this hope that led him consistently to urge the necessity of more active intervention on the part of the British Government ; and it was their acquiescence in the recapture by Ismail Pasha of the control of the administration, after the fall of the short-lived Nubar Pasha Ministry, which during its brief existence from August 1878 to February 1879 had promised some hope of reform, that led him to resign his appointment and

retire from Egypt. "I was interested in the work of Egyptian reform ; but I had no wish to remain in Egypt as a mere receiver of money for the bondholders. I was their representative ; but my sympathies lay more with the wretched taxpayers of Egypt, who were ground to the earth by excessive fiscal burdens, than with those whose interests it was my legal duty to defend. . . . When, in April 1879, Ismail Pasha perpetrated his *coup d'état* and reverted to the worst abuses of the past, all my hopes of carrying the principles into effect appeared for the time to be dashed to the ground, for, although the British and French Governments murmured, they practically accepted the situation and appeared indisposed to take any vigorous and effective action against Ismail. Under these circumstances I determined to cut my connection with the bondholding interest. I resigned my appointment and returned to England early in May 1879."

Baring had returned to England with a definite intention of seeking a career in Parliament ; but circumstances now conspired to fulfil the prediction which he had so often made when he was complaining of the indifference of the British Government to affairs in Egypt. "I can only repeat what I have said before," he had written in March 1878, "that I believe that sooner or later the English Government will be driven out of its policy of non-intervention in Egyptian affairs. . . . You may depend upon it that they will be obliged to step in at last, whether they like it or not" ; and a little later ". . . but if the Government allows matters to go drifting on, the confusion will become worse and worse, and ultimately they will have to choose between a total loss of English influence in Egypt, or interference in a much more serious shape than that which is now presented." He was perfectly right. Prince Bismarck, for one, was not prepared to look passively on while the legal rights of German subjects were flouted by an irresponsible

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notes.

Oriental despot, and he said so. The Imperial Government, he caused the Khedive to be told, would hold him responsible "for all the consequences of his unlawful proceedings." Matters were clearly moving towards a crisis, and in June, a few weeks only after Baring's return to London, Lord Salisbury took action. Ismail Pasha was deposed and his son Tewfik reigned in his stead. In some words by Bacon, Baring found a fit epitaph for the tombstone of a villainous reign :

"Who can see worse days than he that yet living  
doth follow at the funeral of his own reputation?"

Among the steps now decided upon was the restoration of the Controller-Generalships, abolished during the final orgy of irresponsibility in which Ismail indulged. Lord Salisbury offered the post of British Controller-General to Baring. What was he to do? He was no great admirer of Lord Beaconsfield. His personal knowledge of him was slight; he had, in fact, had only one brief interview with him, in the course of which the Prime Minister had made but a solitary reference to the affairs of Egypt, and then only to inquire if there were many pelicans on the banks of the Nile! But he had watched with a good deal of apprehension his guidance of the foreign policy of Great Britain. Asked by a friend in Egypt if he was a supporter of the party then in power, his answer had been quite definite—"No, I am not a Tory—very much the reverse. I am a Whig with the same profound mistrust of the present Prime Minister with which you are inspired." Still, with the downfall of Ismail hope of reform had dawned once more, and after some hesitation Lord Salisbury's offer was accepted.

The new Controller's success in winning the confidence of the Egyptian Ministry, and in inaugurating a whole series of reforms in the interest of the peasantry, was remarkable. The Commission of Inquiry had reported, and the reforms suggested in the report were



taken in hand. Twenty-four petty taxes of a vexatious nature were abolished by a stroke of the pen; the system of paying land tax in kind, which had given rise to grave abuses, was suppressed; and, greatest reform of all, perhaps, from the taxpayer's point of view, an extract from a properly maintained village register was given to each person liable for taxes showing the total of the sums which were due from him under the several heads of account, and the dates on which the taxes would become due. The outlook appeared to be bright; yet there was one small cloud in the sky which Baring detected, and of whose threatening appearance he warned the Prime Minister, Riaz Pasha.

Early in 1879 the officers of the Egyptian army despairing of obtaining the arrears of pay due to them by any other means, mutinied. The mutiny was successful and the officers were paid. But the army was still suffering from many grievances, and Baring foresaw grave danger from this quarter unless their grievances were sympathetically considered. Unfortunately, Riaz Pasha ignored the warning and Baring proved a true prophet. Early in 1881 came the Arabi Revolt, which threw the affairs of Egypt into the melting-pot once more.

Baring was not then there to see the fulfilment of his prophecy, for the tide of events in England had carried him temporarily away from Egypt. The General Election which led to the fall of Lord Beaconsfield's Government in the spring of 1880 had carried Mr. Gladstone to power. And with a change of Government had come large changes of policy both at home and abroad. Lord Lytton had resigned the Viceroyalty of India and Lord Ripon had been appointed in his place. And when, in connection with other changes in the personnel of the Indian Government, Evelyn Baring had been offered the post of Financial Member, he had accepted it and had shaken the dust of Egypt from his feet.

## CHAPTER VII

### FINANCIAL MEMBER IN INDIA

**B**ARING spent six months in England before leaving to take up his new appointment, and did not reach India until December 1880, so that the Budget which it became his duty to introduce in the following spring was necessarily to some extent a legacy from his predecessor. For the past he was, of course, in no way responsible ; but it was his unpleasant duty when presenting his Financial Statement to explain that the cost of Lord Lytton's operations in Afghanistan had converted an estimated surplus of £417,000, for the year 1880-81, into a deficit which he put at not less than £6,250,000.

He was, however, fortunate in finding a large expansion in the normal revenue, and against an actual deficit of more than £6,000,000 he was able to set the fact that the surplus estimated by his predecessor at less than half a million would, but for the extraordinary military expenditure due to the Afghan campaign, have been swelled by the actual receipts of the year to no less a sum than £5,000,000. Here was a situation in which a Finance Member holding the views which he did as to the means by which an alien Government can most effectively benefit an impoverished subject people, saw infinite possibilities.

With the appointment of Lord Ripon to the Viceroyalty, the pendulum had swung back again from the grandiose standards of Lord Lytton's régime to the soberer levels of Lord Northbrook's administration. Indeed, it might be said that it had even swung beyond them. That the keynotes of Lord Northbrook's administration, namely, economy in expenditure and a

determination to keep taxation low, should be revived was in complete harmony with the views of the new Financial Member; but of the wisdom of indulging too freely in experiments in philosophical radicalism in dealing with Oriental peoples he was more than doubtful. "Liberal as I was myself," he wrote, "I occasionally thought Lord Ripon's ideas rather extreme. It was not so much what he did as what he sometimes said that excited so much adverse criticism."

Baring certainly thought that the Viceroy spoke too much in public. He would gladly have seen him modelling himself more nearly upon – to use the phrase coined by a later Viceroy – "the Great Moghul throned in majesty and wrapped in silence"; for he appreciated the danger in India of the use of language in high places which tended to excite hopes which were not fully capable of realization. He was not himself deficient in political idealism; but he never permitted his idealism to blind him to the existence of uncomfortable facts. Particularly was this the case in his dealings with subject peoples. His early experiences of the clash between a subject race – the Maltese – and the ruling Power, in the person of Sir Henry Storks, had never been forgotten. He had then learned that in a somewhat imperfect world counsels of perfection are not always the most efficacious instruments for dealing with the hard realities of a situation; and in all the perplexities of life he recognized the essential wisdom of the golden mean. More and more as time went on, and the weight of the responsibilities which devolved upon him grew, did he display the equipoise of mind, the finely balanced judgment, which enabled him to steer an even course between the Scylla and the Charybdis of many an uncharted sea.

As we look back upon these days of storm, stirred – often, no doubt, unwittingly – by a Viceroy who excited in his own people emotions of dislike as passionate in their intensity as the feelings of affection

which he kindled in the hearts of the natives of the country, we see Baring a figure of granite in a world of flux, washed, but unmoved, by the waves of controversy that swirled around him. Upon all matters of dispute in which no principle of a broad but imperious code of morals was involved he brought an imperturbable common sense to bear. His code of ethics was a high but not a narrow one; it was wholly free from the ignorance and the intolerance, the fads and the fanaticism, that so often marred the movements that sprang from Exeter Hall. Of all human characteristics, cant was the one which he abhorred most. He warmly defended the cause of the Indian taxpayers against the attacks of the Anti-Opium Society. And when he voted against the application of the Contagious Diseases Act to the town of Bombay, he made it clear that he did so, not because he shared the views of the band of fanatics who had earned for themselves the title of "The Shrieking Sisterhood" by their noisy demonstrations against anyone who expressed public approval of the Act in England, but simply because he thought that any attempt to enforce the provisions of the Act in a city with so huge a civil population, would be doomed to failure. The Emperor Napoleon III had endeavoured to stamp out the diseases against which the Act was aimed and had failed conspicuously in the attempt; and where he, with all the resources of the French bureaucratic system behind him, had failed, others were little likely to succeed. On the other hand, he held that the Act could, and on general grounds should, be applied in garrison towns; and he did not disguise his opinion that when the British Government, yielding to a somewhat fictitious popular outcry, consented to its abolition, they committed an act of signal moral cowardice and folly.

In one memorable controversy – the most memorable, indeed, of Lord Ripon's chequered years of office – it appeared as if his native wisdom had deserted him.

In the controversy over the so-called Ilbert Bill, Evelyn Baring stood next to the Viceroy in the extent and bitterness of the invective which he drew upon himself from the opponents of the measure. How came it that he adopted so uncompromising an attitude on a question on which a knowledge of his habitual outlook would have led one to suppose that he would have been the first to urge caution and compromise? The answer may be given in his own words: "Throughout the discussions, the point, which was most clear to my mind, was the absolute necessity of supporting the Viceroy, both as a matter of duty and because, however imprudent Lord Ripon's utterances might occasionally have been, it was quite clear to me that on this particular occasion he had been placed, from no fault of his own, in a position of extreme difficulty."

The fact of the matter was that neither the Viceroy nor any one of his colleagues had realized how delicate was the ground on which they were treading. No warning even of possible opposition had reached them, and they were taken completely by surprise when, on the introduction of the Bill, the storm broke. So little relative importance had been attached to the measure that, though it had been circulated to the members of the Government in the ordinary course of business, it had not occurred to any one of them to ask that it might be considered in Council. Baring has himself admitted that, after glancing at the papers which came to him as a matter of routine, and seeing that the opinions of the local officials had been obtained and that the question seemed to be one of little more than technical importance, he initialled the file and thought no more about it.

The story is an old one, and in its public aspect is too well known to merit repetition. But the inner history of the controversy is less well known, and, since Baring found himself unexpectedly caught up in the vortex of a frenzied racial storm, it is worthy of narration. The Bill, which was designed to confer upon Indian officials

the same judicial powers as those exercised by Europeans of similar standing, owed its origin simply to the administrative inconvenience caused by the exclusion of European offenders from the criminal jurisdiction of Indian magistrates. The removal of this restriction was proposed by Sir Ashley Eden, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. The proposal was referred by the Government of India to the Local Governments, who in their turn called for the opinions of their various officials and reported in due course their views. While the verdict was not uniformly favourable, no warning was to be found, among the many opinions which were received, of the likelihood of any serious public opposition. One man of experience and foresight with a retentive memory did, indeed, scent danger; but the warning which he uttered never reached the Indian Government.

Sir Henry Maine, at one time Legal Member of the Viceroy's Council, and at this time a Member of the Council of India in London, received the papers concerning the matter during an absence abroad. He recalled the fact that a somewhat similar proposal, which had been mooted many years before during Lord William Bentinck's term of office, had excited clamorous opposition, and he wrote privately to Lord Hartington, then Secretary of State for India, reminding him of this experience and urging the need for caution. The demands of political life were not in those days as exacting as they have since become, and a conscientious attention to duty, whether in opposition or in office, was not incompatible with an active interest in other matters. Lord Hartington, as all the world knows, had many interests which lay beyond the restricted purview of Westminster and Whitehall. "The Opposition," wrote Disraeli on one occasion, "not Harty Tarty — but then he is always at Newmarket or somewhere — have a plan. . . ."<sup>1</sup> And it so happened that Sir Henry Maine's letter was put into Lord Hartington's

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lady Bradford, May 31st, 1875.

hands just as he was proceeding to that famous training centre. Thrusting the letter into his pocket, he forgot all about it.

The Bill drafted by Mr. Whitley Stokes was, therefore, proceeded with, and was introduced by Mr., afterwards Sir Courtenay, Ilbert, who had recently succeeded Mr. Stokes as Legal Member of Council. Baring was present when the Bill was introduced. "I well remember his speaking on the subject," he remarks in his Biographical Notes, "... but I did not follow what he said with much attention. I was under the impression that he was dealing with a mere technical and legal question of no great importance." He was not allowed to remain long under this impression. No sooner had Mr. Ilbert delivered his speech than the tempest broke with the suddenness and violence of a tropical thunderstorm; and Baring at once gave his serious attention to the matter. He quickly satisfied himself that a mistake had been made. Whatever the value of the proposal on its own merits, it was obviously not worth the uproar which it had created; and he would gladly have seen the measure withdrawn altogether. Retreat, however, had been made difficult by the very violence of the opposition which had been engendered; and it was decided to postpone further consideration of the Bill until a later Session of the Legislative Council. And when a compromise was ultimately arrived at, Baring had left the country to take up an appointment elsewhere. He had not the least desire, however, to shirk his own share of responsibility for the measure. He had supported the Viceroy over it, and he wished to make it clear that he did so still. He took the opportunity, therefore, when replying to an address of farewell from the Bombay branch of the East Indian Association, to make this plain :

"I wish in the first place to allude to a subject of  
"which no mention has been made in the address  
"itself—I mean the Criminal Jurisdiction Bill. . . .

“ It may possibly be in the recollection of some of you  
“ that when this subject was being discussed in the  
“ Governor-General’s Council last March, I almost  
“ alone of the Members of that Council did not express  
“ any opinion upon it. My reasons for not expressing  
“ any opinion were twofold ; first because I never  
“ make a speech if I can possibly avoid doing so, and  
“ secondly because my views were fully explained by  
“ others who could speak with far greater authority and  
“ eloquence than myself. As, however, I am about to  
“ leave this country, it is just possible that my silence  
“ may be misconstrued. I wish, therefore, to say  
“ that I entirely concurred with the Bill as it was  
“ originally introduced by Mr. Ilbert into the Council,  
“ and further that after giving the fullest considera-  
“ tion to the arguments which have been adduced for  
“ and against the measure since that period, I am, so  
“ far as the essential principles of the Bill are con-  
“ cerned, of exactly the same opinion as I was nine  
“ months ago.”<sup>1</sup>

He was, indeed, willing enough to study the aspirations of the educated Indian, and he declared that there was no part of Lord Ripon’s policy which commanded his sympathy to a greater extent than his measure for the extension of Local Self-Government ; but it is clear that running through his policy from first to last was the conviction that into the hands of Great Britain had been committed the lives and fortunes of the mass of the Indian peasantry – the people who ploughed and sowed and who ought to reap, but who only too often had not a reasonable assurance that they would garner, the fruits of their toil.

It was this solicitude for the peasantry that led him to make one of the few speeches which he delivered in the Legislative Council apart from his financial statements. The Permanent Settlement made by Lord Cornwallis at the close of the eighteenth century had fixed in perpetuity the amount of the land tax ; but it had left indeterminate the relations between the

<sup>1</sup> Speech on August 27th, 1883.



landlords and their tenants. The result was unfortunate ; for as the population increased, and the competition for land became keener, the lot of the peasantry became steadily worse. The growing gravity of the situation had formed the subject of official inquiry and correspondence for many years, and, in accordance with the recommendations of a Commission which had been appointed by the Government of Lord Lytton, a decision to confer upon tenants occupancy rights had at last been taken.

The Bill framed to give effect to the proposal was introduced by Mr. Ilbert during Baring's last year of office. Baring repudiated any suggestion that he was biased against the landlords ; but he was satisfied that under the law as it stood there was little possibility of securing justice for their tenants. There was only one consideration which could have restrained him from throwing the whole weight of his influence into the scale in favour of the Bill, and that would have been a belief that the legislation proposed constituted a breach of faith on the part of the British Government ; for throughout his life it was a cardinal article of his political creed, more especially in his dealings with Oriental races, that the most scrupulous good faith between the Government and the public must in all circumstances be maintained. No demand based on expediency, however urgent, could be permitted to override ; no casuistry, however subtle, could be allowed to obscure, this imperative necessity.

“ The imputation of breach of faith is so serious,  
“ and the moral obligation on the part of the British  
“ Government to adhere scrupulously to any solemn  
“ pledges given to the natives of India, of whatsoever  
“ class, appears to me to be so binding, that I should  
“ wish to state as briefly as possible why I consider  
“ that the argument adverse to the present Bill, based  
“ on the supposition that it involves a breach of con-  
“ tract, is wholly untenable.”

And not the least brilliant passages in a speech which attracted wide attention were those in which he showed

with irresistible logic, not only that the Bill involved no breach of the contract made with the landlords at the time of the Permanent Settlement, but that it constituted a tardy fulfilment of pledges given to the cultivating classes. That those pledges had not been fulfilled was indisputable. Nothing emerged more clearly from a study of the literature on the subject which had come down from Lord Cornwallis's day than the fact that one of the chief objects of the authors of the Permanent Settlement was to prevent the levy by the landlords of illegal cesses; nothing emerged more clearly from investigations carried on for a number of years past than the fact that this object had not been attained. Every year when the peasant went forth to plough the land a fee was levied on him in celebration of the commencement of agricultural operations; every barber paid a fee for plying his trade, every weaver a fee for the possession of his loom. As the result of an inquiry held ten years before, it had been shown that no less than twenty-seven different cesses were being levied upon the tenants in one district of Bengal alone. Here was sufficient cause for intervention on the part of those to whom the protection of the inarticulate masses had been entrusted.

But as Finance Member he was in a position to confer positive boons upon the peasantry. The Budget of 1882-3 was the most important of the three Budgets for which he was responsible. The customs duties, with one or two necessary exceptions, were swept away amid the plaudits of the Cobden Club in England, whose president took as his text for his speech at the annual dinner the words, "*Ex oriente lux.*" The measure was regarded in some quarters in India as intended to assist the Lancashire mills in competition with the indigenous industry. Baring indignantly repudiated any such suggestion. The object which the Government had in view in abolishing the cotton duties, he explained, was not to confer any advantage on English manufacturers, but

to give to the Indian community generally the full advantage of free trade. "I do not doubt," he added, "that as economic knowledge advances, and as the practical results to the country which are to be derived from a free trade policy become yearly more apparent, those advantages will be more and more fully appreciated."<sup>1</sup>

Of more immediate advantage to the masses was a substantial reduction in the salt duty; and among the measures designed to benefit the agricultural classes which owed much to his initiative were: the extension of railways, the formation of agricultural banks, and the purchase of Government stores wherever possible in the country. His success as Finance Member, judged by results, was certainly remarkable—a deficit of more than £6,000,000, when he took charge of the finances of the country in 1881, had been converted into an estimated surplus of £657,000 when he relinquished his control in 1883; and this in spite of handsome remissions of taxation during the same period. That he was exceptionally fortunate in the circumstances of the time he would himself have been the first to admit—how fortunate was shown not long after his departure, when a heavy fall in the value of the rupee combined with large increases in military expenditure necessitated the reimposition of the customs duties and, for a time, a restoration of the salt duty to the figure from which he had reduced it. But he deserves full credit for the way in which he took advantage of the favourable conditions which chance brought his way. Not only had he restored equilibrium between revenue and expenditure, but he had, in the words of the Indian Association of Bengal, "by the introduction of wise reforms re-established that confidence in the financial system of the Empire which had unhappily been lost."

He left India in August 1883, his signal services recognized by a knighthood in the Order of the Star of India,

<sup>1</sup> Reply to an address from the Sarvajanic Sabha, Poona, August 18th, 1883.

and widely hailed as a true and valued friend in the columns of the Indian Press. "I am afraid Ripon will feel your loss dreadfully," Lord Northbrook wrote ; and he spoke with the intimate knowledge derived from personal experience.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BACKGROUND OF EGYPT

SIR EVELYN BARING reached Egypt on September the 11th, 1883. A great deal of history had been written during the three and a half years which had elapsed since his departure from the country in the spring of 1880. The revolt of the army under the leadership of Ahmed Arabi and Ali Bey Fehmi had taken place, followed by a brief period of acute unrest during which power had passed definitely from the civil authorities to a military junta, with the leader of the mutinous troops at its head; in Paris and London serious differences had broken out between the Governments of France and Great Britain which had left them powerless to influence the course of events, with the result that the position of the Controllors had been gravely impaired and Baring's former colleague, M. de Blignières, had resigned; the crisis towards which these various currents had been moving had been reached; the bombardment of Alexandria had taken place; the battle of Tel-el-Kebir had been fought, and the country effectively occupied by British troops. The one solution of the Egyptian question which the British Government had been most anxious to avoid had, in fact, been forced upon them.

The student of events will perceive, in the happenings to which the bombardment of Alexandria was the prelude, an interesting example of history repeating itself. Not for the first time were the British people engaged in over-running an important tract of territory in what Sir John Seeley has described as "a fit of absence"<sup>1</sup>; nor for the first time was a British Government to be

<sup>1</sup> *The Expansion of England.*

seen "looking one way and moving in another."<sup>1</sup> It may indeed be said without hesitation that in 1882 Mr. Gladstone's Government were looking in any direction except that in which they were moving. They were caught up in the tide and swept along in the direction of a military occupation; but they went protesting, and, when they found themselves in possession of the country, they did so to their own dismayed astonishment and utterly against their will.

To the play and interplay of historical tendencies they seem to have been curiously blind; or they would, surely, have recognized, and have been prepared for, the force of the current along which, as it turned out, they were carried impotently to their unwelcome destination. To others with greater foresight, the pressure which world events were bound sooner or later to exert upon Great Britain to intervene actively in the affairs of Egypt had been plainly apparent. "Pour détruire véritablement l'Angleterre," Napoleon had declared, "il faut nous emparer de l'Égypte"<sup>2</sup>; and to Mehemet Ali, who wrested Egypt from the grip of Turkey, so certain did the intervention of Great Britain appear to be, that he sought to guard against it by calling in the French. Thirty years in advance of the event, Kinglake had foretold with striking accuracy the happenings of 1882: "The Englishman, straining far over to hold his loved India, will plant a firm foot on the banks of the Nile and sit in the seats of the faithful."<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Gladstone's Government had most unwillingly planted a foot on the banks of the Nile; but they had not the smallest intention of keeping it there for one moment longer than they could help, and, weeks before their representative was due to take over the duties and responsibilities of his office, Lord Granville was urging on him the importance of an early withdrawal—"I rather hope that you will be able to advise a further

<sup>1</sup> *The Expansion of England.*

<sup>2</sup> *L'Europe et la Révolution Française*, Sorel.

<sup>3</sup> *Eothen.*

withdrawal of troops at the beginning of next year, keeping a sufficient force at Alexandria''<sup>1</sup>; and again when Baring was on his way to Cairo :

"It is possible that you will arrive in Egypt before the mail of next week from London. I therefore write one line to tell you that you will receive instructions by that mail to report fully whether you see any objection to an early diminution of the troops and the withdrawal of the whole garrison from Cairo. The Cabinet is anxious that this should be done . . ."

And his old chief, Lord Northbrook, now at the Admiralty, crossed the *t*'s and dotted the *i*'s of the Foreign Secretary's letter – "I will not enter upon Egyptian politics except first [just?] to say that the main question for *us* [the Government] is, how soon our troops can safely leave Cairo."

This, then, was the position when Evelyn Baring reached Cairo in September 1883: the Arabi rebellion had been quelled; the country had been in the military occupation of Great Britain for the past twelve months; the Khedive and his Ministers, with an exhausted Treasury and with greatly impaired prestige and authority, were functioning fitfully behind the shelter afforded by the British occupation; while in the background the *deus ex machina*, in the shape of the British Government, was endeavouring to effect the speediest possible exit from the stage upon which it had been called upon to play a most unwilling part. In the auditorium, so to speak, looking on with none too friendly eyes, were the Governments and representatives of France and the other European Powers.

There is no need to retell the story of these days, which has been set forth with unsurpassed authority by Lord Cromer himself in the pages of *Modern Egypt*.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Granville to Major Baring, June 29th, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Granville to Sir E. Baring, August 31st, 1883.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of September 5th, 1883.

What is of importance here is to see how Evelyn Baring himself reacted to the surroundings in which he now found himself placed. In his general outlook he was still a Liberal rather than a Conservative. At the same time his own experience, from the days when he had first come into contact with Nationalism in the flesh in Malta, had taught him that it is not always possible to make the undiluted theories of academic Liberalism fit the hard facts as they present themselves when a nation which has reached a comparatively high plane of civilization is brought into forcible contact with a people living on a lower plane. This lesson had been brought home to him in India ; it was now to be repeated with added emphasis in Egypt. Baring returned to Cairo fired with the ambition, to use his own words, " of leading the Egyptian people from bankruptcy to solvency and then onward to affluence, from Khedivial monstrosities to British justice, and from Oriental methods veneered with a spurious European civilization towards the true civilization of the West based on the principles of the Christian moral code."<sup>1</sup> He has himself made it quite clear that in his opinion armed British intervention was, in the circumstances of 1882, not merely the inevitable solution of the difficulties which had arisen, but also the best solution. And he thought it the best solution because it alone gave hope of that policy of reform which he so ardently desired to see embarked upon. Both the Government and the public in Great Britain were anxious to see drastic alterations effected in the system of Government in force in Egypt ; both were equally anxious to see a speedy withdrawal of British troops. What they failed to see was that the adoption of one of these policies was wholly destructive of the other. " It was natural and praiseworthy that public opinion in England should have been opposed to handing the Egyptians over to the uncontrolled rule of the Turkish pashas," Baring wrote at a later date ; " but

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notes.



it was characteristic of the want of consistency which so often distinguishes English politics that the same people who cried out most loudly for control over the pashas were also those who most strenuously opposed the adoption of the only method by which the pashas could be effectively controlled. They wished to withdraw the British troops, and, at the same time, to secure all those advantages which could only be obtained by their continued presence in the country.”<sup>1</sup>

Even with British troops still in occupation of the capital, the task of inaugurating reforms was far from easy. “When I exert pressure here,” he told Lord Granville, “I always feel as if I was hitting a feather bed. There is no resistance, but any impulse which is given soon dies out unless constant efforts are made to keep them up to the mark.”<sup>2</sup> How onerous the task was likely to become after the withdrawal of Great Britain and a return to the *status quo ante* it was not difficult to foresee. The prerequisite of a programme of reform was a Government capable of enforcing its authority over the unruly and disloyal elements which, held in check by the presence of British troops, were only too likely to assert themselves after the restraining influence had been removed. Of this danger Baring felt bound to warn the Government. If it was their intention to transfer to the Khedive the responsibility for maintaining order, they must in fairness allow him to enforce his authority in his own way.

“... there can be no doubt whatever that the  
 “ authority of the Khedive and his Government is  
 “ very much weakened ; moreover, the whole tendency  
 “ of the reforms we now have in hand is to weaken  
 “ it still further. In fact the essence of the most  
 “ important of those reforms is to afford protection to  
 “ the people against the arbitrary acts of the Govern-  
 “ ment. I do not see why the policy of withdrawal  
 “ should not be carried out ; but it can only be carried

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. i., p. 333.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of October 14th, 1883.

“out with safety if, on the first symptoms of disturbance, the Khedive and his Government act with vigour and put it down with a strong hand. I was entirely in favour of sparing Arabi; but the circumstances have now changed. Arabi was our prisoner of war. When he was tried we were virtually responsible for the preservation of order. Our responsibility will now to a great extent cease and will devolve on the Egyptian Government. For the purposes of the present argument I am more apprehensive of what may happen in England than in Egypt. If, when the Egyptian Government strikes sharply, the English Press goes into hysterics and Parliament attempts to interfere, whatever remaining shred of authority is left to the Khedive will disappear, and we shall have to look out for trouble in the future – of this I feel assured. Of course this is just what Blunt<sup>1</sup> and his friends would like – their cure for Egyptian misgovernment is a revolution. I hope it may be possible to effect a cure by the application of a less drastic remedy.”<sup>2</sup>

If this were granted, he saw no reason, he said, why the policy of withdrawal should not be successfully carried out.

How far was he himself in agreement with this policy? For the reasons which have been stated it is difficult to believe that it met with his whole-hearted approval. He had reached a stage at which the difficulty of reconciling the aspirations born of a sane and lofty imperialism with the requirements of Gladstonian liberalism was beginning to make itself vaguely felt. His hopes for Egypt beckoned him in one direction; his loyalty to liberalism and to the Liberal Government urged him in another. The hard logic of facts was warring against the political loyalties of a lifetime. And as the days passed by and the facts asserted themselves, as facts will do, the struggle became keener and more bitter.

“I feel more and more every day,” he told Lord Northbrook, on April the 4th, 1884, “that not

<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Granville, October 9th, 1883.

“ only I, but the Government I am serving, are in a  
 “ false position. . . . Surely it is a cruel fate that drives  
 “ me, with all my strong opinions against an extension  
 “ of territory and the assumption of fresh responsi-  
 “ bilities and with strong anti-Jingo convictions  
 “ which deepen every year I live, to be constantly  
 “ making proposals which, at all events at first sight,  
 “ have a strong Jingo flavour. . . . In this uncongenial  
 “ political atmosphere I am always having to act and  
 “ to speak in exactly the opposite way to what I  
 “ should wish.”

So long as he could he clung to his loyalties and his Liberal faith. “ I think I shall be able to recommend the evacuation of Cairo and the diminution of the total force in Egypt,”<sup>1</sup> he wrote a short time after his arrival in the country ; and, even after events had taken place which rendered a postponement imperative, he still wrote hopefully of the eventual success of the policy :

“ I hope you will fully understand that what I am  
 “ chiefly aiming at is eventual withdrawal, and al-  
 “ though the policy will now take longer than we  
 “ originally hoped, I see no reason why it should not  
 “ eventually be carried out, if only you will keep the  
 “ Tories out of office.”<sup>2</sup>

The new factor in the situation which necessitated a postponement of the policy of withdrawal was the success of the Mahdist rebellion in the Sudan. “ I was sent to Egypt to tell the British Government what it was to do with a country which it had ‘conquered in a fit of absence,’ ” Baring noted down, quoting Seeley’s pungent apophthegm. “ Before the question could be answered another fit of absence supervened, and the vast territory from the Southern Egyptian frontier to the equator was practically absorbed into the British dominions.”<sup>3</sup>

The whole situation was, in fact, changed by the defeat of the Egyptian army, which had set out under

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Granville, September 27th, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Granville, January 7th, 1884.

<sup>3</sup> Biographical Notes.

the command of General Hicks to recapture Kordofan. The decision to allow General Hicks to advance against the Mahdi, whose rebellion had steadily been gathering force, had been taken by the Egyptian Government before Baring's own arrival ; and the ill-starred expedition had actually started from Khartoum three days before he had reached Cairo. The British Government, concerned only to reduce their commitments in Egypt, had refused either to advise the Khedive or to accept any responsibility for events across the border. And, in the absence of advice which the British Government alone were in a position to give, the Khedive and his Ministers had been guided less by a consideration of the probabilities or otherwise of success, than by a very natural disinclination to admit themselves incapable of maintaining their rule over the outlying portions of their dominions. " Nous en causerons plus tard," Chérif Pasha light-heartedly remarked when Baring suggested, in conversation with him shortly after his arrival, that it might be wise to give up the outlying provinces ; " d'abord nous allons donner une bonne raclée à ce monsieur [the Mahdi]."

General Hicks was a gallant soldier, but his position was an impossible one. The Egyptian Treasury was exhausted and the troops under him were unpaid ; they were, as was natural enough in the circumstances, not only undisciplined but in part, at least, actively disloyal. These things were known. Why, then, did the British Government allow the Khedive and his Ministers to take, and act upon, a decision fraught with such obvious danger ? There seems to have been no reason except that to tender advice to the Egyptian Government would have been contrary to the tenets of Gladstonian Liberalism, which ruled out any sort of interference in the affairs of the Sudan. " I fully understand the policy of the Government," Baring wrote on November the 22nd, 1883, " which is, not to be drawn into affairs in the Sudan." And loyalty prompted him to

add – “I see no reason why this policy should not be carried out.” Nevertheless, in his deliberate judgment the Government could not escape responsibility for the unfortunate consequences which had already attended a too rigid application of the policy. Lord Granville could, and should, have taken his courage in both hands and have forbidden the despatch of the Hicks expedition to Kordofan. To refuse to do so was to make a fetish of a political formula :

“ Lord Granville appears to have thought that he  
 “ effectually threw off all responsibility by declaring  
 “ that he was not responsible. There could not have  
 “ been a greater error. The responsibility of the  
 “ British Government for the general conduct of affairs  
 “ in Egypt did not depend on a few phrases thrown  
 “ into a despatch and subsequently published in a  
 “ Parliamentary paper. It was based on the facts  
 “ that the British Government were in military  
 “ occupation of the country, that the weakness and  
 “ inefficiency of the native rulers were notorious, and  
 “ that the civilized world fixed on England a responsi-  
 “ bility which it was impossible to shake off so long  
 “ as the occupation lasted. . . . Lord Granville failed  
 “ to see this. Instead of recognizing the facts of  
 “ the situation, he took shelter behind an illusory  
 “ abnegation of responsibility which was a mere  
 “ phantasm of the diplomatic and parliamentary  
 “ mind. The result was that the facts asserted them-  
 “ selves in defiance of diplomacy and Parliamentary  
 “ convenience.”<sup>1</sup>

It is, indeed, impossible to exaggerate the difficulty of the position in which Baring now found himself :

“ My own position, I need hardly say,” he wrote on November the 26th, “ is one of extreme difficulty. It is practically impossible for me to sit still and not advise on all, or nearly all, matters. But I make a very great distinction between Sudan affairs and Egyptian affairs properly so called. In the

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. 1., p. 366.

“former case I give friendly advice and assistance  
 “but with the clear understanding that on behalf of  
 “the English Government I will take no responsibility.  
 “In the second case my responsibility is evidently  
 “more distinct and prominent. I think I under-  
 “stand the general lines on which the Government  
 “at home wishes to proceed, and I will do my best  
 “to carry them out. But certainly I have never in  
 “my experience known a situation so full of difficulties.”<sup>1</sup>

One thing was certain, and that was that with the southern frontier of Egypt now open to attack from a victorious fanatic, the withdrawal of British troops from Cairo was no longer possible, and Baring accepted responsibility for advising against it. “I was, as you may imagine, sorry to be obliged to recommend the maintenance of the English garrison at its present strength,” he told Lord Granville on November the 22nd, “but I have not a shadow of doubt as to the necessity.” And he made it clear, in a letter written on December the 17th, that if, as he himself advised in all the circumstances of the case, a policy of complete withdrawal from the Sudan and of concentration behind their own frontier was to be urged upon the Egyptian Government, a tightening rather than a relaxation of Great Britain’s hold upon Egypt would prove inevitable :

“As I telegraphed to you, I think your decision  
 “about the Sudan was probably the best of which  
 “the circumstances admit, but it will be exceedingly  
 “difficult to carry out the policy. In the first place  
 “the real difficulties are very great. The policy of  
 “abandonment down to Wady Halfa or Aswan will  
 “almost certainly involve an increase to the British  
 “garrison and a considerable postponement of the  
 “policy of withdrawal. In the second place, the  
 “policy is so exceedingly distasteful to the Egyptian  
 “Government that I doubt if anything but the  
 “strongest language, and possibly a change of Ministry,  
 “will make them accept it.”

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Northbrook.

There is, indeed, little doubt that these first years of what was to prove a long and memorable term of office as the representative of Great Britain in Egypt were in every respect the most difficult and the most exhausting. He was understaffed and overworked. Incredible though it may seem, he does not appear to have had even a stenographer at his disposal.

"I miss the shorthand writer I used to have in India, terribly," he told Lord Granville, and "the work here is enough to break one's heart."<sup>1</sup> To Lord Northbrook he wrote: "I think you will give me a character as a pretty hard and quick worker; but I really do not think that even you, with your extraordinary power of rapid work, could cope with the whole thing here."<sup>2</sup> The work and anxiety preyed upon him, and his health suffered. "Evelyn has been confined to his bed the last few days with fever and a severe sore throat," Lady Baring wrote in February 1884. "I have seldom seen him so ill. I attribute his great prostration to the amount of anxiety and work he has had lately, and of course it has been quite impossible to keep his brain quiet, as every matter, great and small, is referred to him . . ."<sup>3</sup> And if, as the result of indisposition, he was obliged to slow down for a few days, the task awaiting him on his recovery was proportionately increased. "Directly I am laid up, as I was a few days last week," he told Lord Northbrook, "everyone sits still and waits for orders, except a pertinacious few who penetrate into my bedroom in spite of a very courageous defence on the part of my wife, armed only with a bottle of cough mixture." And, much as he appreciated Lord Granville's fine courtesy and personal charm, he was often exasperated by his indecision. "Lord Granville always seemed to me to make the mistake of confounding the cases in which the dawdling *laissez-faire* policy was wise, with those in which it was necessary to take time

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Granville, January 21st, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> March 4th, 1884.

<sup>3</sup> Lady Baring to Lord Northbrook, February 18th, 1884.

by the forelock and have a clearly defined policy at an early date. This, in a Foreign Minister, is a great fault. He becomes to too great a degree the sport of circumstances. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Before reaching Egypt, Baring had asked that he might be furnished with general instructions, and had soon learned that this was more than he could expect. "I will consider the question as to giving you general instructions," Lord Granville had written in June 1883, "but at present am rather inclined not to do so." So long as it did not involve active intervention on his own part, he looked on at the activity of others in a spirit of mildly amused cynicism. "I do not object to any despotism against Blunt," he wrote, when the Egyptian Government were considering the advisability of refusing that stormy petrel permission to land. "If the Egyptians keep him out, I presume his only redress will be to appeal to his consul, or, in the ultimate resort, to the Foreign Office, and I do not think we need exert ourselves." But he was equally unwilling to exert himself when pressed to do so by his Agent in Egypt. "It would require some time to consider and answer your powerful but gloomy view of the situation in Egypt," he wrote in November 1883. "I am afraid the remedy you suggest is too drastic ; but I will reflect over what you say and let you know my impressions and those of others." He steadily adhered to the view that the Cabinet had been wise in not attempting to dissuade the Egyptian Government from despatching the expedition to the Sudan under General Hicks - ". . . we were right in not taking upon ourselves the odium of preventing Egypt from defending vast territories which she did not want to give up." Baring's view was that it was precisely on this point that Her Majesty's Government had committed an unpardonable blunder ; but what could he say when his chief concluded the same letter with the words : "It is an immense comfort

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. i., p. 393.



to have a man in whom we have such confidence as yourself at Cairo."

Had the Government acted more freely upon the advice of the man in whom they professed so much confidence, it is possible that there might have been one blot less on the pages of English history. But they did not do so ; and the story of the tragic months of 1884, during which Baring, in face of almost constant discouragement, continued to render consistently loyal service to a Government with which he profoundly disagreed, throws a flood of light upon his character, and more particularly upon his high conception of public duty. The story, therefore, will be recalled.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PROBLEM OF THE SUDAN

ON February the 5th, 1885, the world learned that Khartoum had fallen. In England the news was received by an incredulous people amid an awed hush imposed by the stunning force of the blow. But when the full significance of the disaster was understood and it was realized that Gordon was either a captive or had perished, mutterings of anger reverberated over the land, raising a storm and a tumult and stirring the people to protests of passionate indignation. Could Baring have done more than he actually did do, to ward off the catastrophe? Short of overstepping the bounds which he held to be implicit in the duty of a public servant, it is difficult to see how he could have done.

It was sometimes said of him that throughout his career in Egypt he carried his resignation in his pocket. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Had he done so, it would have been tendered, not once, but a dozen times, during those burdensome months when, under the nerveless grasp of Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues, events were moving disastrously to their humiliating climax. Many men finding themselves in his position would assuredly have done so; and there is little doubt that, had he felt free to follow his own inclination, he himself would not have hesitated to take that course. "... Personally I should not be sorry to be out of the whole thing," he told Lord Northbrook on March the 18th, 1884; "for I do not see my way to doing much good." But his conception of a public servant's duty was a different one: "Of course I shall do my utmost to carry out the views of the Government,

although I entirely disagree in the latter phase of its Sudan policy. . . ."<sup>1</sup> So far as I know, there was only one occasion during his career in Egypt on which he definitely made up his mind to resign, and that was when Lord Rosebery was dealing, with the most praiseworthy firmness and ability, with the rebellion of the young Khedive, Abbas II, against the predominance of Great Britain. The question of Lord Rosebery's own resignation suddenly became imminent, and Evelyn Baring made up his mind that, if Lord Rosebery gave effect to his threat, he would follow his example.

Similarly it has been said of him that he was habitually reticent—that he sat Sphinx-like on the banks of the Nile, brooding in baffling silence upon the perplexing problems of Egypt, thinking much but saying little. Such a view of him is not borne out by a study of his private correspondence. He was diffident, certainly, in obtruding himself unnecessarily upon the notice of his official chiefs. He aspired to supplying them with so much information only as was necessary to a proper appreciation of the facts and tendencies of any particular situation. "Do I keep you sufficiently informed?" he asked Lord Northbrook. "If not, tell me so. I could write more despatches on things in general, but I have got it on the brain that much writing is not a good thing for the moment."<sup>2</sup> Such justification as there may have been for a charge of taciturnity was to be found in the fact that he thought, not once, but twice, before he spoke. But when he did speak it was with conviction, and what he said was worth listening to—better worth listening to, perhaps, than Lord Granville always realized. "Gladstone and Childers are grumbling about expense of telegrams," the Foreign Secretary wrote in December 1884, little more than a month before the fall of Khartoum. "Please condense as much as you can," though he had the grace to add,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Northbrook, March 18th, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated March 11th, 1884.

"but omit nothing of urgent importance." To the onlooker he may have seemed to possess a temperament "all in monochrome, touched in with cold blues and indecisive greys – eminently unromantic."<sup>1</sup> But, if so, appearances were deceptive. "He wrote a despatch – a long, balanced, guarded, grey despatch, informing the Government that 'he ventured to think,' etc." True; but loyalty to his chiefs often caused him to draft official despatches – and even telegrams – which might subsequently be published, with extreme caution. "I do not want to send an official telegram which will embarrass the Government more than I can possibly help," he told Lord Granville in a private communication, on December the 10th, 1883. "I should, therefore, be very glad if you could give me some indication of your views in time for me to telegraph officially before the next Cabinet." "I have written a despatch which is intended for publication," he wrote privately on another occasion. "Under these circumstances I have not thought it desirable to go into the reasons which have led me to my conclusions. To have dwelt on these reasons would have involved the discussion of some awkward questions. . . ." But this did not mean that the awkward questions were not discussed. "I have written this privately," he explained, at the end of a letter to Lord Granville, covering eight large quarto sheets of print, on April the 3rd, 1885, "as I understand that you rather prefer the adoption of this course."

When he disagreed with the Government he hesitated neither to say so, nor to explain at length why he did so. "Your last despatch about finance is slightly aggressive," Lord Granville wrote in January 1885. "But I always like to have your candid views, whether I quite agree with them or not." There was nothing "guarded" or "grey" about these illuminating communications. And if his more formal official despatches

<sup>1</sup> *Eminent Victorians*, by Mr. Lytton Strachey.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

were "balanced and guarded," they were so for a reason which to Baring was adequate, for he was painfully aware that if it appeared that he disagreed with the Government, he gave "a handle for contemptible party attacks in Parliament," and that, as he told Lord Northbrook, "is just what I want to avoid." It should be added that while he expressed his opinions with clarity and with force he was seldom dogmatic. On the contrary, he was often extremely diffident. "... Pray do not think that I assume that what I propose must necessarily be right," he begged Lord Northbrook. "I can assure you that if you could read my innermost thoughts, you would think very differently. I am very strongly convinced of the enormous difficulty of the task we have in hand, and I think he would be a very bold man indeed who would aspire to speak with absolute confidence as to what is, or has been, the best course to pursue at any given moment."<sup>1</sup> And this was the man of whom a French writer said, "*La farouche figure de ce proconsul apparait comme un anachronisme en ce siècle de civilisation et de diplomatie . . . Au Foreign Office, sa brutalité impose ses volontés comme au palais du Khédive.*"<sup>2</sup>

That the "enormous difficulty" of the task was due in part to the flaccidity of the Government is beyond question. Their besetting sin was indecision — a paralysing inability to determine upon action in any direction. They drifted like a rudderless bark on a storm-tossed ocean. When their representative on the spot propounded a definite course of action, they exhausted their ingenuity in formulating objections to it. This was not difficult, since the circumstances were such that no possible alternative existed which was not open to some more or less serious objection; but it was not helpful. "The misfortune during the last two years," Lord Granville wrote on April the 18th, 1884, "has been that we hardly ever have had anything but bad alternatives

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated April 4th, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> L. I. Picard.

to choose from. The objectors to whatever was decided were pretty sure to have the best of it." And, since this was so, was it not obvious that wisdom lay in refraining from taking any decision whatsoever? To Baring, to whom vacillation in face of any emergency calling for prompt and resolute action was the one unforgivable sin, such an attitude was more than exasperating. And, since the Government had no mind of their own, they were peculiarly liable to be influenced by anyone who had, or, what was worse, to be blown hither and thither by passing gusts of popular feeling. It is probable that it was a combination of such influences that led them, in January 1884, to send General Charles Gordon to the Sudan.

The idea of sending out Gordon certainly sprouted in the mind of the Government before it was watered by a clamorous Press. By whom was the seed sown? Writing to Mr. Gladstone more than four years after the event, Lord Granville said: "We agree that a majority of the Cabinet were not morally responsible for sending out Gordon." In his biography of Lord Granville, Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice attributes a special responsibility to four Ministers – Lords Hartington, Granville, and Northbrook and Sir Charles Dilke – "as sponsors of the idea"; but he adds that among those who shared the moral responsibility for what was decided were Mr. Gladstone, who concurred in it, "and some who were not Ministers at all." We may without hesitation name Lord Wolseley as one of these. Did Lord Wolseley – and perhaps Lord Hartington – to whom the prospect of the complete abandonment of the Sudan was far from palatable, foresee – as Mr. Lytton Strachey has not obscurely hinted<sup>1</sup> – that with a man of Gordon's character and temperament in the Sudan the prospect would scarcely be likely to see fulfilment? Certain it is that no one knew better than Lord Wolseley the fierce impetuosity of Gordon's militant spirit. "Looking

<sup>1</sup> In *Eminent Victorians*.

to the fanatic character of the man," he had advised against him being permitted to accept the invitation of the King of the Belgians to proceed to the Congo to manage things there. We know, too, that on hearing of the Hicks disaster Lord Wolseley had urged upon Lord Hartington the desirability of sending reinforcements to Suakin, Berber, and Khartoum, and that Lord Hartington had expressed agreement with him. Egypt, Lord Hartington had told Lord Granville on November the 23rd, 1883, would never voluntarily give up the provinces east of the White Nile; and he had added that he did not think that she should be asked to do so. It is not without significance that Gordon's name should have made an appearance in the Foreign Secretary's despatches a few days later. Nor can we overlook the fact that it was Lord Hartington who, after the fall of the Chérif Ministry in January 1884, again urged upon Lord Granville the despatch of Gordon, mentioning that Wolseley thought that his employment "would be most desirable." "Lord Granville," we are told, "now gave way," and we are further informed that Mr. Gladstone "also with hesitation signified his concurrence."<sup>1</sup>

With this particular aspect of the question Lord Granville's biographer is apparently not concerned. On so delicate a topic he hazards no opinion; all that he asks us to observe is, that since Gordon's mission was first proposed, early in December 1883, it was not "suddenly forced on an unwilling Government in 1884 by public opinion." There is obvious force in such an argument; yet it has also to be observed that, after Baring's rejection of it in December 1883, the proposal lay dormant until it found vehement advocacy in the Press early in January 1884.

The circumstances may be briefly recalled. With the failure of the Hicks expedition the fate of the Egyptian garrison beleaguered in Khartoum became an urgent

<sup>1</sup> *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, by the Hon. Bernard Holland, vol. i., p. 41.

and an anxious problem. The Egyptian army was quite incapable of affording effective aid; the British Government had not the smallest intention of lending troops for the purpose of reconquering the country and no one was really anxious to invoke the help of Turkey. In these circumstances Baring accepted full responsibility for advising that the Sudan be evacuated. That the advice would be unpalatable to the Egyptian Government he was well aware, and he was neither surprised nor disconcerted when Chérif Pasha and his Ministry tendered their resignation to the Khedive. On the contrary, he thought that good might come of it. "They did not thoroughly understand that they must, on important matters, do what they were told," he wrote on January the 7th, 1884. "This very essential point will now become clearer."<sup>1</sup> He himself contributed towards the process of clarification by letting it be known that, if no Egyptian was prepared to form a Ministry to carry out the evacuation, he would take the Government into his own hands, though with a wisdom born of experience he refrained, as he admitted some years afterwards, from reporting this home officially. This threat was effective, and Nubar Pasha accepted the Khedive's invitation to form a Ministry. "Ils [the Khedive and his Turkish advisers] m'ont nommé pour se sauver de vous autres Anglais," he told Baring. And, the policy of abandonment having been accepted, the question of immediate practical importance was how best the evacuation could be effected. "Having decided what to do," Baring wrote on January the 14th, "the next thing is to do it."<sup>2</sup>

It was at the beginning of December 1883 that Lord Granville had first inquired if General Gordon could be made use of for the purpose. The Egyptian Prime Minister was opposed to the idea, and Baring had advised against it. The retreat from Khartoum would

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Granville.

<sup>2</sup> To Lord Granville.



be a very difficult and critical business, he told Lord Northbrook. If they got away the garrison together with such of the civilians, women and children, as wanted to leave, without a disaster, they might consider themselves lucky. The main object of British policy was to avoid being drawn into military operations in the Sudan. How was this policy to be carried out if an Englishman was sent to take charge of the evacuation and, as was possible and even probable, found himself in his turn beleaguered at Khartoum? He gave the Government credit for sufficient intelligence to realize this for themselves. ". . . Surely before he went," he wrote in April 1884, three months after the decision to send Gordon had been taken, "the very great risk of having to send an expedition to bring him away was considered? I know I considered it very much."

For the next few weeks nothing more was heard of the suggestion; but early in January the Press, headed by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, suddenly discovered Gordon. The fame of his exploits in China as leader of the "Ever Victorious Army"; his more recent success in the Sudan itself in imposing order and suppressing the slave trade; his complete indifference to personal danger; his religious fervour and stoical contempt for the things of this world; the very eccentricities of his character – and they were many and marked – all combined to cast a halo about him and to portray him in heroic guise. "Gordon," as Mr. Gladstone himself remarked, "was a hero, and a hero of heroes." In an incredibly short space of time, indeed, he seemed to be qualifying as a striking illustration of the theory associated with the name of the Greek mythographer, Euhemerus. By a public ill-informed as to the actualities of the situation he was acclaimed as the one man destined and competent to retrieve the disaster involved in the defeat of General Hicks.

It was in these circumstances that, on the resignation

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Northbrook.

of Chérif Pasha, Lord Granville returned to the charge, and on January the 10th, 1884, again asked if in the altered conditions General Gordon's services could not be made use of. Baring adhered to his previously expressed opinion. He had already discussed the matter with the new Prime Minister, Nubar Pasha, who had concurred in his objections to the despatch of an Englishman, and had agreed to the appointment of Abdulkader Pasha, a capable soldier and former Governor-General of the Sudan. And it was only when the Foreign Secretary, who had persuaded Mr. Gladstone that "a little pressure on Baring" was advisable, made it clear in a third telegram that the Government were not prepared to oppose the wishes of the public – "it would be popular at home," he naïvely interjected – that he gave a reluctant assent.

## CHAPTER X

### THE PROBLEM OF GORDON

IN his account of the events referred to in the last chapter, which Baring published many years afterwards, he gave it as his considered opinion that if it was a mistake to send any Englishman to Khartoum, it was a still greater mistake to choose General Gordon as the man to send.<sup>1</sup> He had first met him in 1878, when the Khedive contemplated appointing him President of a Commission of Inquiry into the financial condition of Egypt. He had studied the man of whom he had heard much with particular interest, and had conveyed his first impressions of him to Mr. Goschen in a letter written at the time – “altogether he impresses me, so far, as an excellent, simple, good-hearted, and impracticable man, about as much fit for the work he has in hand as I am to be Pope.”<sup>2</sup> Subsequent experience led him, not to a more lenient, but to a harsher, judgment. Lord Ripon had taken Gordon to India as his private secretary; but within a few days of his arrival in Bombay he had come to the conclusion that he could not conscientiously discharge the duties of such an office and had incontinently resigned. The incident had not been lost on Baring, who had been led to a further study of the baffling character of the man with whom later on he was to be so closely associated. While he admired his indomitable courage, his singleness of purpose, and his contemptuous disregard of rank and wealth, he detected in him other characteristics which seemed to him to render him utterly unfit to occupy

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. i., p. 429.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated March 8th, 1878.

any high and responsible official position. He was impulsive, wayward, and fanatical. He seemed at times scarcely to be responsible for his actions. His religious beliefs, however sincerely held, often impelled him to unbalanced and even fantastic action. What reliance was to be placed on the judgment of a man who, when in doubt, would open the Book of Isaiah at random and be guided by the first text upon which his eye happened to alight? To Baring all these disabilities in Gordon's character and temperament were plainly apparent, and the adoration with which he had suddenly come to be regarded by the public struck him as one of the strangest incidents of which he had ever had experience. The objections to entrusting him with the particular mission which the Government had in view seemed to be exceptionally strong. With singular—though probably calculated—indiscretion, Gordon had already expressed his views upon the problem of the Sudan. Those views differed profoundly from the views which the Government were known to hold. Even after the die had been cast and the genie, to quote Lord Morley's words, had been improvidently let forth from the jar, Baring thought it desirable to call the attention of the Government to the glaring inconsistency of Gordon's published opinions with the objects which the Government had in view. "I hope you may have made it clear to him," he telegraphed to Lord Granville, on January the 19th, "that he is not to carry out the policy set forth in his letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette*; if not, I anticipate a good deal of trouble." With comfortable complacency, Lord Granville dismissed such fears. "I will support your view with Gordon. I feel reliance on his carrying out our policy and not that announced in *Pall Mall*."

How, then, are we to explain—not Baring's acceptance of the Government's decision, for he had pressed his objection to a point beyond which he may well have thought that resistance would be futile, but the

misleading cordiality of the message in which his acceptance was conveyed :

" Gordon would be the best man if he will pledge himself to carry out the policy of withdrawal from the Sudan as quickly as is possible consistently with saving life. He must also fully understand that he must take his instructions from the British representative in Egypt and report to him. . . . I would rather have him than anyone else, provided there is a perfectly clear understanding with him as to what his position is to be and what line of policy he is to carry out."

What is the explanation of this telegram, which can only have left upon Lord Granville's mind an altogether false impression of Baring's real sentiments? The explanation can only be that which the sender himself subsequently gave. He found himself almost alone in his disapproval of the Government's suggestion, and in these circumstances he mistrusted his own judgment — " I gave a reluctant assent, in reality against my own judgment and inclination, because I thought that, as everybody differed from me, I must be wrong."<sup>1</sup>

It was natural enough that, having come to this conclusion, he should have displayed a tendency to stress such aspects of Gordon's own activities as seemed to justify the general view. He admired his courage and his cheerful optimism. " Don't be a funk," Gordon wired to the Governor of Khartoum. " You are men, not women. I am coming. Tell the inhabitants." This was the sort of spirit that was wanted. He was pleased, too, that Gordon had been dissuaded from ignoring the Khedive, as he had originally intended doing — " he really ought to see the Khedive ; his dislike of him is rather silly," Baring had told Lord Granville. Not only did he see the Khedive, but got on admirably with him. He apologized to him " in execrable French for having written things about him.

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt.*

The Khedive was delighted. . . .”<sup>1</sup> The Khedive was not the only highly placed Egyptian with whom Gordon effected a reconciliation. He insisted on seeing the one man who was credited with an unassuageable thirst for Gordon’s blood – Zobeir Pasha, soldier, slave-trader, conqueror of Darfur, and former Governor of the Bahr-el-Ghazal, whose son had been killed in an encounter with Gordon’s troops and whose own fall from power had been due in no small measure to Gordon’s influence. No wonder that Baring described the interview between these two men, held, at Gordon’s request, in his presence, as “the most curious episode of his visit.” The sequel to this strange encounter was more astonishing still, for Gordon urged that the best way of settling affairs in the Sudan would be for Zobeir to accompany him to Khartoum. Baring would have welcomed the despatch of Zobeir to Khartoum in place of Gordon; but he thought that the risk of allowing him to go with Gordon would be too great. “He hates Gordon bitterly, not so much on account of his son’s death, as on account of the treatment he himself had received at Gordon’s hands.”<sup>2</sup> And he was not yet convinced that there was no danger from Zobeir once he found himself beyond the reach of the authorities in Cairo.

Throughout his stay in the capital Gordon displayed an unwonted reasonableness. He accepted with cordiality the final instructions drafted for him by Baring, in which the end to be pursued was defined as the evacuation of the Sudan and the restoration of the country to the tribal chiefs who had controlled it at the time of its conquest by Mehemet Ali. The grandiose projects which he had himself put forward in the Press in England, if not wholly forgotten, at least seemed to have receded into the background of his consciousness. He spoke hopefully of completing his mission in three or four months. “I got on capitally

<sup>1</sup> Sir E. Baring to Lord Granville, January 28th, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Granville, January 28th, 1884.

with Gordon," Baring wrote in a private letter to Lord Northbrook on January the 28th; and to Lord Granville: "I am very glad he came, for I believe he is the best man we could send."

The Government could scarcely be blamed if in face of these and similar expressions of satisfaction they supposed that they were carrying their representative with them. Yet, whatever impression Baring created on the mind of the Government, his own doubts of the success of Gordon's mission lingered; "my own heart was heavy within me."<sup>1</sup> He had good cause for his forebodings. With every step that Gordon took in the direction of the Sudan, his spirits rose. Upon most men the dry, sun-drenched air of the desert acts as a stimulant; upon Gordon's effervescent personality it acted as an intoxicant. Under the sense of freedom induced by the vast open spaces which unrolled themselves before him, the restraints of Cairo fell from him. Ideas raced in endless succession across his mind; projects jostled one another in vain attempts to find a lodgment; and the confused outpourings of his vivid imagination flashed over the telegraph wire to reduce the British Consul-General to a state of bewildered irritation. "I wish to goodness that Gordon, like Dickens's young lady," he wrote on March the 11th, "could be made to count twenty before he writes or telegraphs."<sup>2</sup> Lord Northbrook, himself a convinced admirer of Gordon, admitted his excitability — "he seems to be so impulsive that he can't help saying everything that flits across a very excitable brain."<sup>3</sup> Contact with the people excited his liveliest pity for them in face of the anarchy which he believed would necessarily follow on the evacuation, unless satisfactory arrangements were made for the future government of the country. There is no need to set forth here the successive stages by which he travelled from his earliest instructions

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. i., p. 460.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Northbrook.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Sir E. Baring, February 8th, 1884.

to "report" to the Government on the situation in the Sudan and arrived at the ultimate – or, should we not say, reverted to the original – goal which he set before himself, namely, that of "smashing the Mahdi." The story has been told in detail in the pages of *Modern Egypt*. It is only necessary here to deal with one of his propositions.

Through all the confusion and inconsistency of his many proposals, there was one respect in which he showed an unwonted steadfastness ; he clung tenaciously to the suggestion that he had made in Cairo that Zobeir Pasha should be sent to the Sudan. And to Baring, pondering upon the growing complexities of the situation, the attraction of this proposal grew. One by one all those on the spot whose opinion counted arrived at the same conclusion. Gordon himself was insistent ; Stewart, Gordon's companion – "wet nurse," as Gordon himself once dubbed him – at first doubtful, became an advocate of the scheme ; Nubar Pasha, the Egyptian Prime Minister, approved it ; and finally Baring himself wholeheartedly endorsed it. With extraordinary fairness he subsequently summed up in the pages of *Modern Egypt* the arguments for and against the proposal and the probabilities or otherwise of its success, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions. But there is not the smallest doubt that at the time he held the opinion which he expressed, strongly, and that he resented bitterly the refusal of the Government to accept the advice which he gave :

"I am in despair about the general policy. We are  
"drifting on, we know not where. I do not mean to  
"say that the Zobeir proposal is not open to some  
"objections, the principal one being its unpopularity  
"in England ; but the real argument in its favour  
"is that the objections to any alternative policy  
"seem to me to be overwhelming. The instructions  
"now sent to Gordon virtually amount to this ; that  
"he is to abandon the outlying garrisons, that he is  
Hc



“ to get out of Khartoum as well as he can, and that  
 “ he is to leave nothing behind him. If we do not  
 “ come to grief over such a policy as this, I shall be  
 “ very much surprised.”<sup>1</sup>

The position of the Government was certainly a difficult one. Zobeir Pasha had been a notorious slave-trader. Feeling in the anti-slavery organizations in England had been roused by a recent gesture – of all people in the world – by Gordon, who, finding that under the policy of abandonment there was not the slightest hope of bringing slavery in the Sudan to an end, said so. And, since he thought that the hostility of the tribes would be mitigated, and the prospects of his own mission improved, by an authoritative statement of what appeared to him to be an obvious fact, he did not hesitate to say so with dramatic emphasis. He issued a Proclamation, conferring upon those who possessed slaves “ full right to their services and full control over them.” The Government were aghast. “ Gordon’s Slave Trade Proclamation was swallowed with a very wry face. It was very unadroit. . . .”<sup>2</sup> And the despatch of Zobeir could not now be thought of. Lord Northbrook put the position succinctly in a letter to Baring on March the 21st :

“ You were quite right in pressing your view about  
 “ Zobeir . . . but, whatever the real merits of the  
 “ question were, it was *impossible* to send Zobeir.  
 “ If we had authorized it we should have been im-  
 “ mediately beaten in the House of Commons, where  
 “ the feeling was very strong, led by W. E. Forster ;  
 “ and Salisbury had committed himself against it in  
 “ the Lords the moment it was announced in the  
 “ papers that we were going to do it. So we should have  
 “ been turned out and our successors would have been  
 “ committed against Zobeir ; therefore he could not  
 “ have been sent anyhow.”

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Northbrook, March 18th, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Northbrook to Sir E. Baring, March 12th, 1884.

But the breach between Baring and the Government at home was widening. The progress of events in the Sudan had been rapid. By the end of March it was no longer a question whether on the evacuation a reasonable form of Government could be arranged for ; it was a question whether without a relief expedition General Gordon and Colonel Stewart could be extricated from Khartoum. Baring urged upon the Government the importance of despatching a relief expedition from Suakin, then held by General Graham with a force of British and Indian troops ; the Government refused, and Baring begged them to reconsider their decision in a telegram on March the 26th:

“ . . . I do not believe in the impossibility of helping Gordon, even during the summer, if Indian troops are employed and money is not spared. But if it be decided to make no attempt to afford present help, then I would urge that Gordon be told to try and maintain his position during the summer, and that then, if he is still beleaguered, an expedition will be sent as early as possible in the autumn to relieve him. . . . No one can regret more than I do the necessity of sending British or Indian troops to the Sudan ; but having sent Gordon to Khartoum, it appears to me that it is our bounden duty both as a matter of humanity and policy not to abandon him.”

The extent of the gulf which had now opened between the man on the spot and the people at home is apparent from the correspondence which passed between Baring and his old chief, Lord Northbrook. For the first time a note of acerbity found its way into Lord Northbrook's letters :

“ It is quite true that in three of your recommendations we have not been able to agree ; but pray recollect that the responsibility rests upon us, not upon you, and that while you are right to express your opinion with the utmost freedom, on the other

“ hand you must remember that it is not only possible, but probable, that we, from being removed from the immediate influences which must surround you, are not unlikely to be right ; and certainly we must be better able than you can be to weigh the real importance of Egyptian affairs with the whole interests of the Empire, while we certainly must be better judges as to the feelings of the people of this country and of Parliament, by which, so long as England is governed as it is now, the conduct of every Government must be controlled.”

He dealt at length with Baring's request for a relief expedition :

“ Lastly comes your telegram of the 26th, which we considered to-day, in which you urged us either to send an expedition to the relief of Gordon at once, or to tell him one would be sent in the autumn if he remains shut up in Khartoum. I do not see how, upon reflection, you could expect us to agree. Have you considered the nature of the operation ? The danger to India of employing Indian troops . . . ? Have you considered how such a determination can be reconciled with our policy from the moment the destruction of Hicks's army was known ? . . . Did anyone, when Gordon was sent, contemplate his support by an expedition ? Certainly no such support was ever contemplated at the time. Are the circumstances such as to justify us in departing from this policy ? I cannot see it.”

And he returned to the responsibility of the Government :

“ Now, however all this may be, one thing appears to me to be clear, that upon this question the Government at home must be better able to judge than you can possibly be. We are much better able than you to balance the general interests of the country against the obvious considerations of the Sudan difficulty, and I am sure you will see that at least we are as likely to be right as you can be. I write all this for it seems to me that, both from your telegrams and from your last letter, you are

“too much inclined to suppose that you must be right  
“and we must be wrong.”<sup>1</sup>

Baring replied to this challenge in the longest document he had penned, whether official or private, since he had been in Egypt. He begged his correspondent not to imagine that he was in the least personally sore at the rejection of his proposals. At the same time he could not help feeling a good deal disheartened and discouraged. “It is heartbreaking work to go on slaving as I do without apparently doing the least good.” He dealt *seriatim* with Lord Northbrook’s points; and he made some observations of a more general nature. They must remember that beyond indications of the most general nature he had never had any lead given him from home. The Government had throughout assumed that the best way of avoiding serious intervention in the Sudan was not to interfere in any sort of way in its affairs. He could not bring himself to believe that the results of this policy had been successful.

“In one of the telegrams I received about Zobeir it was said that the Government would not take any responsibility in the way of nominating a ruler of the Sudan. But surely it is better to take this responsibility than to run the risk – which is every day becoming more real – that we shall gradually drift into governing the Sudan ourselves. . . . Broadly speaking, what I mean is this: that I view with great anxiety and mistrust the policy of waiting upon events in the Sudan.” The way in which events had developed in Egypt proper was there to serve as a warning:

“As regards Egypt, we have not got to annexation,  
“and I see no reason why we should get to it. . . . But  
“we have certainly managed somehow or other to  
“drift into a hybrid form of government, to which  
“no name can be given, and for which, so far as I  
“know, there is no precedent. It involves almost

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated March 27th, 1884.

“all the disadvantages of governing the country directly, without any of the advantages. Looking back at all that has occurred, I cannot blind myself to the fact that if after Tel-el-Kebir we had at once assumed greater responsibility, we should by this time be much further advanced than is actually the case towards the attainment of the object which we have in view, viz. to divest ourselves of responsibility and to leave Egypt to govern itself.”<sup>1</sup>

A short time after penning the above letter, Baring left for England to attend a Conference in London on the financial situation in Egypt, and his work in Cairo was carried on temporarily by Mr., afterwards Sir Edwin, Egerton. During his absence the attitude of the Government was characterized by the same fatal indecision that had caused him so much concern throughout the preceding months. Indeed, of all the errors of judgment for which they had been responsible he considered their delay in deciding on the despatch of an expedition to the relief of Gordon the least excusable. And it was upon Mr. Gladstone that he laid the blame. “Mr. Gladstone’s error of judgment in delaying too long the despatch of the Nile expedition left a stain on the reputation of England which it will be beyond the power of either the impartial historian or the partial apologist to efface.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated April 4th, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 17.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE EVIL OF GLADSTONIANISM

THE story of Gordon and Khartoum has been referred to at some length because Baring's experience of the Gladstonian method of dealing with the problem exercised a profound influence upon his own political outlook. I have described in an earlier chapter his youthful leanings towards Radicalism. With experience this tendency towards the left in politics had disappeared, and he had found his political salvation in the traditional creed of the Whigs. It was only when personal association with Mr. Gladstone and his allies in connection with the affairs of Egypt opened his eyes to the defects of Liberalism, as practised by them, that he looked elsewhere for his political leaders.

Yet it was with the exponents of the creed rather than with the creed itself that he differed. While he was charmed by Lord Granville's courtesy and good nature, he was exasperated by his indecision, and he did not always appreciate the lightness of touch with which he sometimes handled serious matters. "It takes away somewhat of the position of a man if he has to sell his racers and hunters," Lord Granville wrote with reference to the reluctance of the Egyptian Government to agree to the abandonment of the Sudan. "But if he cannot afford to keep them, the sooner they go to Tattersall's the better." Public excitement and indignation after the fall of Khartoum found expression in acrimonious debates in Parliament. Lord Granville's references to them in his letters to Baring seemed to their recipient to be scarcely in keeping with the gravity of the issues – "Northcote moves a vote of censure on

Monday. . . . I am (shall I say afraid or hopeful?) that we shall not be turned out."<sup>1</sup> If Baring was goaded into criticism of the decisions of the Cabinet, Lord Granville brushed them aside with a good-natured shrug: "I sent you a telegram about your criticisms on Cabinet decisions. A public condemnation of what has been decided does harm in many ways, besides being unusual. These telegrams go at once to the Queen and all the Cabinet; but I particularly beg that you will not refrain from giving me your full opinions. I never keep them to myself; but I know better how to deal with them."<sup>2</sup> His farewell message when the Government at last fell was typical: "I now understand the feelings of a stage-coach horse when unharnessed at the end of a hilly stage. I cannot pretend that it is not a relief to cut my present official connection with you; but I shall never forget the satisfaction of acting with a man of your ability and loyalty."<sup>3</sup>

Yet Lord Granville was but the acolyte. Towering above him and the other members of the Ministry was the high priest of a political habit of thought and way of life which had already become a cult, and was spoken of, after the name of its founder and chief hierophant, as Gladstonianism. Gladstone himself was troubled with no doubts as to the extent of his personal predominance both in his own party and in the House of Commons. It happened that Baring's recommendation in favour of sending Zobeir Pasha to the Sudan was discussed at a Cabinet meeting from which Mr. Gladstone, owing to temporary indisposition, was absent. The proposal being one which was certain to excite vehement and widespread criticism, the Cabinet felt unequal to dealing with it in the absence of their chief, and Lord Hartington was deputed to consult Mr. Gladstone in his bedroom. On his return, the envoy is alleged to have reported in some such terms as follow: "He thinks that he himself might

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 20th, 1885.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated March 27th, 1885.

<sup>3</sup> Letter dated June 12th, 1885.

carry the proposal through the Commons, but that we can't, so we had better not try."

It was in connection with foreign policy that Baring first fell foul of Mr. Gladstone; but he took a view of him which differed fundamentally from that taken by the generality of the Liberal leader's critics. "He was generally thought to be very pusillanimous in dealing with foreign affairs. That is not at all the impression I derived. He was wholly ignorant. Whenever he made an incursion into the domain of foreign affairs he rarely lost the opportunity of saying or doing something foolish."<sup>1</sup> And the fact that his folly was the outcome of valour – albeit the valour of ignorance – rather than of cowardice, did not render it less mischievous. Negotiations during the Conference which Baring attended in London in the summer of 1884 pursued a stormy course. "Eh bien," observed de Blignières, rubbing his hands, "c'est la guerre!" In company with Lord Granville, Baring went across to the Treasury to report to the Prime Minister. "Mr. Gladstone lashed himself into a frenzy of moral indignation over the wrongs of the *fellahin* and the selfishness of the French, and from his language one might well have supposed that de Blignières' prophecy was about to be realized."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the distrust with which Baring came to look upon Mr. Gladstone grew out of bitter personal experience. It grew inexorably and much against his will. From an admirer he became a critic, and from a critic a convinced and caustic opponent. And the root cause of his hostility was a conviction, born of official and private contact with him, that with all his phenomenal moral and intellectual equipment, he was not a man to whom the destinies of the British Empire could safely be entrusted. This was no hasty judgment. There was much that predisposed him in Mr. Gladstone's favour. The Liberal Leader's love of the classics, his brilliant

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Newton, November 29th, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



scholarship, his genuine appreciation of the masterpieces of Greek literature – these qualities provided a powerful bond of common interest. He admired, too, the high moral plane on which his political life generally was passed, and the stimulus which he gave to liberal thought and action, not in his own country only, but throughout the world. He sympathized keenly with some, at least, of his political ideals. Yet when, with his own mind matured by close personal contact with men and affairs, he reviewed the achievements of Gladstonian Liberalism, he found them singularly meagre and disappointing. The main reason for this poverty of result was suggested to him by a remark once made to him by Mr. Gladstone himself. He had appeared on the political arena, he said, at a time when the work of the party to which he belonged consisted mainly in the destruction of privilege. Baring, turning this over in his mind, came to the conclusion that when that work was completed Mr. Gladstone's occupation was in reality gone. For his was a destructive, not a constructive, genius. Just as he exercised his physical strength by felling trees, so did he devote his political faculties to lopping, pruning, or uprooting existing institutions. Was it because he left no great act of constructive statesmanship as a legacy to the nation that memory of his words and deeds ceased so quickly to serve as a living and active force in politics?

But if there were some things which the two men had in common, there were many more which set them as the poles asunder. Baring was no narrow specialist; his was an active and inquiring mind which compassed many subjects beyond the range of his own immediate task. But he was aware of human limitations; Gladstone apparently was not. It was not given to any man, Baring thought, during the short period allotted to human life, to acquire anything like a thorough acquaintance with one tithe of the subjects about which Mr. Gladstone was wont to speak and to write – not infrequently with a dogmatism which can only be justified by the possession

of special knowledge. And, bringing his own analytical and accuracy-loving mind to bear upon this aspect of Mr. Gladstone's protean personality, he became deeply impressed with the calamitous consequences which inevitably attended intellectual megalomania on this stupendous scale.

"There was scarcely a subject," he wrote in an unpublished critique of Mr. Gladstone's character, "from the highest political and theological issues to the most trivial circumstances of life, which did not, at one time or another, occupy Gladstone's omnivorous intellect and on which he did not communicate his ideas to the world. State budgets, Church establishments, the Mosaic cosmogony, the state of Italy, the Homeric myths, and the best method of arranging books in a library – these and scores of other subjects came alike to him. Some *Æstrus* seemed to impel him to form decided opinions on all of them and to let the world know what those opinions were, the medium adopted being a speech, a pamphlet, a magazine article, a bulky volume, as in the case of *Juventus Mundi*, a letter to a friend, or even a humble post-card."<sup>1</sup>

One consequence was an irritating form of self-deception fostered by an ill-founded assumption of omniscience. Gladstone believed in his own infallibility; he was, consequently, rudely assertive and dogmatic. As a matter of fact, he was often wrong – even in those matters of which his knowledge was profound. A writer in the *Edinburgh Review* was taken to task by him for describing the Troy of the Iliad as a noble city with spacious streets. "This is not so," stormed Gladstone. "Ilios in Homer is lofty, is beetling, is wind-swept, is sacred, is I know not what, except large, or well-built, or broad, or broad-wayed."<sup>2</sup> Baring would never have dreamed of competing with Gladstone in his knowledge of Homer; but he was sufficiently familiar with the Iliad to convict

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notes.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Gladstone in the *Contemporary Review* for June 1874.

that authority of a glaring error. "In Iliad I. 164," he noted in his commonplace book, "Troy is described as well-built (*εὐναϊόμενον πτολίεθρον*), and in II. 29 as broadwayed (*πόλιν εὐρύγυιαν*)."<sup>1</sup> And if Gladstone, being human, was prone to error even where subjects of which he was a master were concerned, his claim to knowledge in the vast range of subjects which he aspired, but failed, to master often rendered him ridiculous. Lord Wolseley once asked Sir Joseph Boehm, the sculptor, who was engaged upon a statue of Mr. Gladstone, if he did not find him an interesting sitter. "Yes," Sir Joseph replied; "but unfortunately Mr. Gladstone will talk to me about art, and about art he knows nothing whatever."

When on the point of leaving for India to take up the post of Financial Member in 1880, Baring turned to Mr. Gladstone, who was then considered the highest living authority in England on all financial questions, for advice. "The only suggestion he had to make was that the Government cash balances should be reduced. He urged somewhat strongly the desirability of adopting this measure. I treasured his suggestion in my mind, and, on my arrival in Calcutta, considered the desirability of adopting it. I found that Mr. Gladstone was entirely wrong in his facts, and that, far from effecting any reduction, it was necessary that the Government cash balances should be increased."<sup>1</sup> This assumption of infallibility was undoubtedly fostered by the atmosphere of domestic adulation in which Mr. Gladstone passed the later years of his life. When at his dinner-table a distinguished Prussian officer who had taken part in the Franco-German War attempted, though without success, to correct his host upon a number of points of fact, a menu was surreptitiously put into his hand on the back of which was written, "We never contradict him."

There was another respect in which the two men were temperamentally far apart. Baring possessed a particularly tidy mind, in which words were carefully

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notes.

shelved and indexed and brought out only as required to give concise and accurate expression to his thought. Gladstone's mind was a vast storehouse littered and choked with words, phrases, paraphrases and periphrases, idioms and figures of speech, which, for all his mastery in manipulating them, he employed to the utter confusion of those who sought enlightenment at his hands. To the one a parenthesis was a delight, to the other a source of sheer vexation. The clouds of words by means of which Mr. Gladstone sought to convey an impression of superior knowledge were always particularly irritating to Baring. When Egyptian affairs were in a highly critical condition, he proceeded to the House of Commons to hear Mr. Gladstone's declaration of policy on behalf of the Government. What was required, and what he hoped to hear, was a concise and perfectly unambiguous statement. He was grievously disappointed, and he has left it on record that, as he listened, admiration for the orator and the dialectician waned and a feeling much akin to contempt for the phrase-monger supervened. He found himself bewildered by a long speech which contained "an exordium, an ingenious display of Socratic dialectics, and a peroration"; but which left him as ignorant of the policy of the Government as he had been before Mr. Gladstone had risen to speak. "One of the reasons why this result was produced was that Mr. Gladstone was very ill acquainted with his subject. He could not, therefore, explain to others things which he did not himself understand."<sup>1</sup>

Gladstone's well-known habit of leaving open to himself "a haven of ambiguity" into which, should occasion require, he could subsequently retreat, seemed to Baring to constitute a serious disability in anyone responsible for conducting the affairs of an Empire. He thought that the well-known lines in the *Anti-Jacobin* were scarcely a caricature when applied to many of Mr. Gladstone's speeches :

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notes.

*The noble Lord says I approve his plan ;  
I never did, my Lords, I never can.  
Plain words, thank heaven, are always understood,  
I said I could approve, but not I would.*

Baring himself was always a careful student of facts, and not until he had collected, collated, and analysed all the available facts of any particular situation did he attempt to formulate an opinion with regard to it. It seemed to him that Mr. Gladstone too often reversed this the normal process of inductive reasoning. He adopted the conclusion that best suited his purpose and then strained the facts in order to make them fit in with his preconceived conclusion. The facts themselves, of course, remained impervious to such pressure, and in the end always asserted themselves. It was Mr. Gladstone's attempt to make the facts of the situation in the Sudan in 1884 fit in with his disinclination to send an expedition to the relief of Gordon that led to the disaster of January 1885.

It was, therefore, fortunate for Baring that after the fall of Mr. Gladstone's Government in June 1885 he was, except for a short period in 1886 and again in 1892-4, under the orders of other chiefs. From being a critic of Lord Salisbury he became a staunch admirer. Lord Salisbury's aptitude for discarding details and grasping at once the main points of any international situation seemed to him to be wholly admirable. He was better qualified, too, than Mr. Gladstone with his lofty idealism and Lord Granville with his airy cynicism, to cope with " the vein of coarse and sordid egotism " now introduced into the conduct of foreign affairs by the man who was manœuvring himself into the position of arbiter of Europe. Prince Bismarck's methods might, from an ethical point of view, be crude ; but so long as the policy of foreign States was governed by their interests and relative strength rather than by moral considerations, they were effective. When, in 1868, Bismarck had offered Belgium to France, he had said to Prince

Napoleon : " Les faibles sont faits pour être mangés par les forts." It was doubtless greatly to the credit of Gladstonianism that such principles lay beyond its comprehension ; but since Utopia was still far off it was obviously useless to act as if it had arrived. And when, as frequently happened, Bismarck demanded with brutal frankness a prompt and plain answer to a plain and generally unpleasant question, it was sheer folly to seek to evade giving it by appealing piously to the arbitrament of some categorical imperative in the realms of abstract thought.

To Baring the change effected in the general situation by the advent of a Conservative Government to power, brief though its life proved to be, was plainly apparent. " I take it for granted," he wrote to Lord Rosebery, who had become Foreign Secretary, on Mr. Gladstone's return to power in February 1886, " that you want me to tell you exactly what I think, and that you will not mind if I make some remarks which are not complimentary to the Liberal Party." He explained that being, so far as he had any party sympathies, a " Moderate Liberal " himself, he said what followed more in sorrow than in anger :

" I left Egypt last July, just after Lord Salisbury came into office. I returned about three weeks ago. In the interval of six months there has unquestionably been a great improvement in the state of affairs here. Locally there was no change of policy. I attribute the improvement entirely to three causes. These are : (1) the fact that the Egyptian, as well as the general foreign policy of the Conservative Government, inspired confidence among all classes in Egypt ; (2) the fact that we got on good terms with Bismarck, and therefore with Austria, and thus broke up the serious political coalition which formerly existed against us ; and (3) the fact that the payment of the indemnities has thrown some money into the country."

And, bearing in mind the failure of Mr. Gladstone's

previous Government to cope with Bismarck, he uttered a warning :

“ The point which I venture to press most urgently on  
“ your attention is the necessity of working well with  
“ Germany. Berlin, and not Cairo, is the real centre  
“ of gravity of Egyptian affairs. If we drift again  
“ into the same position in which we were a year ago  
“ – that is to say, into a position in which every Power  
“ except Italy is unkindly – no efforts to put matters  
“ right locally will avail ; if, on the other hand, we  
“ are well with Bismarck, we have a chance of gradually  
“ solving our difficulties here. I look on this as the  
“ key to the whole situation.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 9th, 1886.

## CHAPTER XII

### ESTABLISHED IN EGYPT

IN the autumn of 1883, Baring had written optimistically of the prospects of withdrawing the British garrison from Egypt. He had then seen no reason why the number of troops should not be reduced to something less than 3,000 within the next few months, though he had been unable to advise a complete withdrawal quite so soon. "We must give a little more time to allow the whole machine of Government to steady itself," he had told Lord Granville. By the dawn of 1886 his view had undergone a radical alteration. He did not suggest that our occupation of Egypt need last for ever, but he was sure that it would be in the highest degree imprudent to fix any time at which we would engage to withdraw. The country was not yet civilized enough to walk by itself, and some European interference in the Government was essential, if the land was not to slide back into "the tranquil Oriental barbarism" of former days. Nothing but evil, he told the Government, could result from deceiving themselves as to the real facts of the case — "I think, therefore, that the continuance of British occupation for a period to which at present no limit can be fixed should be taken as the point of departure for all discussion on Egyptian affairs." There remained to be considered the rather delicate question as to the nature of the interference which Great Britain was to permit herself. Baring thought that at the moment he need not "discuss fully" the terms on which the British occupation ought to continue. He would only say that, as matters stood, they had "all the disadvantages and none of the advantages of an avowed Protectorate." They were harassed at every turn by some international



engagement. Their aim should be, he thought, to obtain more liberty of action. "Whether we shall be able to obtain the liberty without the use of English credit to settle the financial difficulties of the country is more than I can at present say. In case of necessity, I think we ought not to shrink from the adoption of this course, however unpleasant it may be." Nothing "guarded" or "grey" about this communication. Mr. Gladstone, if he ever saw it, probably wished that it had possessed in greater degree the negative quality of colourlessness. It is possible that Baring himself speculated as to the reception which this candid expression of his views would meet with. He had said a good deal, and for a start, he thought, enough. "I think I have now said all that I need for the present say on the general condition of affairs."<sup>1</sup> Here again we may hazard the conjecture that the Government thought so too.

Nevertheless, with Lord Rosebery as Foreign Secretary, Baring's relations with Mr. Gladstone's Government of 1886 were a good deal happier than they had been with Mr. Gladstone's Government of 1884. Lord Rosebery was well aware of the difficulties of Baring's position during the closing years of Mr. Gladstone's previous Administration, and wrote appreciatively to him "of your late loyal co-operation under circumstances of much difficulty, requiring no common tact and much tenderness of treatment." He thought, too, that Egypt had suffered from too many inquiries from home. Gordon's mission "to report on" the position in the Sudan provided a warning. Since then Lord Northbrook had been sent out by Mr. Gladstone "to report," and had made some valuable recommendations on the financial aspect of the Egyptian question, including a proposal for a British guarantee for a loan, which, as Lord Northbrook pointed out, would have substituted the control of England for the international control which had been proposed at the London Conference of

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Rosebery, February 15th, 1886.

1884. These recommendations had been rejected by Mr. Gladstone. When Mr. Gladstone had given up the attempt to dispose of the Egyptian question, Lord Salisbury had taken a hand and had despatched Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, first to Constantinople and then to Cairo, to see what he could do by negotiation with the Turk. When Lord Rosebery had succeeded Lord Salisbury at the Foreign Office, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff had done little more than sign a Convention with the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs providing for the despatch of Special Commissioners to Egypt to investigate and discuss a number of matters named in the Convention. In concert with the Turkish Special Commissioner, Sir Henry was now investigating and discussing these matters on the spot. Lord Rosebery could not, of course, know what the outcome of this particular series of investigations and discussions would be ; but he was probably not very hopeful, and, if he was not, he was justified by the result, for a Convention signed on May the 22nd, 1887, was never ratified by the Sultan, and eighteen months of investigation and discussion proved, therefore, to have been abortive. Baring's relations with Sir Henry Drummond Wolff were all that they should be ; but we may suppose that he was not displeased when he received the following pronouncement from Lord Rosebery :

" I have no wish to disturb for a moment the even  
" current of Egyptian affairs at this time. My policy  
" would be to leave things alone for the present and  
" shield the Egyptians from the intolerable nightmare  
" of new Commissioners, Projects, Reports, and Con-  
" ventions. If we can allow Egypt to be under the  
" impression that she is to have a short holiday from  
" the highly educational and stimulating spasms  
" under which she has suffered for the last five years,  
" she ought to grow sleek and comfortable. But  
" if we are going to send out further schemes and  
" reforms and schemers and reformers, Heaven help  
" her. I am in some hopes, however, that the present

"Government will find its hands sufficiently full with  
"Ireland."<sup>1</sup>

Lord Rosebery's reign at the Foreign Office was a brief one. He was succeeded, on the return of Lord Salisbury to power in August 1886, by Lord Iddesleigh. To Baring, now firmly established in Egypt, these frequent changes were annoying. They constituted a hindrance to the achievement of the ambition which now seemed to him to be emerging into the realms of what was possible, since each fresh incumbent of the office had in turn to be brought up to the essential "point of departure for all discussion on Egyptian affairs." It was fortunate, therefore, that among Baring's assets was a rock-like patience. "You ask my opinion," he wrote in reply to a letter from Lord Iddesleigh, "on certain points 'which require to be settled before we can fix a term for our occupation of Egypt.' I think it would at present be very unwise to fix any term for our occupation of Egypt. We might, in dealing with the Porte, fix a term . . . at the expiry of which we should be prepared to talk over the matter with them again; but to say with any degree of assurance that we will withdraw at any given date, even though that date be remote, would be to make an engagement which we might not, and very probably should not, be able to keep."<sup>2</sup>

Baring was, in fact, by now well down in the saddle. The Sudan complication was for the time being out of the way. The Mahdi had died suddenly in June 1885; the tribes had been taught a lesson at the battle of Ginniss; the eventual decision of Mr. Gladstone's Government in 1885 not to advance upon Khartoum, arrived at in accordance with advice tendered by Baring himself in April of that year, left him free to devote himself wholeheartedly to the task which he kept steadily before himself throughout his career in Egypt – that of leading the Egyptian people from bankruptcy to affluence, from

<sup>1</sup> Lord Rosebery to Sir E. Baring, February 19th, 1886.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated October 31st, 1886.

Khedivial monstrosities to British justice, and from barbarism towards the true civilization of the West based on the principles of the Christian moral code. The magnitude of the change brought about in the condition of the people during the next twenty years is not a matter which admits of dispute ; it can be demonstrated almost with the precision of a mathematical formula. The finances of the country, from the habilitation of which all other reforms may be said to have flowed, underwent a remarkable transformation. By the end of Lord Cromer's long term of office, Egypt, which in the early 'eighties was heading for the second time within a decade for bankruptcy, was a country whose credit in the money markets of the world stood second only to that of France and England. Taxes, both direct and indirect, had been reduced ; and duties which had weighed heavily upon the poor, or had proved irksome in collection, had been abolished ; the system of forced labour known as the *corvée* had been brought to an end ; an annual deficit had become an annual surplus ; large sums had been laid out in productive undertakings, yet the capital of the Public Debt and the charges on account of interest and sinking fund had been appreciably reduced ; a substantial reserve fund had been built up. Irrigation works, second only in size and importance to those constructed by British engineers in India, had been undertaken, bringing to the peasant's fields, "in a measure surpassing his wildest expectations," the element for which above all else he thirsted, the fields themselves which, when Baring first went to Egypt, were tending to pass out of his hands into those of foreign creditors had been secured, and, where they had actually been lost, to a large extent restored to him ; an Agricultural Bank and Agricultural and Horticultural Societies had been established. An efficient army had been created ; the horrible prison system had been reformed, and order and justice had taken the place of confusion and tyranny ; slave-markets had been abolished ; the purchase of a

slave had become a criminal offence attended with danger both to the buyer and to the seller, and thousands of actual slaves had been set free. Sanitary and medical administration had been placed on a modern basis; hospitals and dispensaries and medical and veterinary colleges had been established. Justice had ceased to be a commodity to be hawked in the market-place and knocked down to the highest bidder. The people, generally speaking, had learned that they were ignorant, and had developed a desire to be taught—education consequently had been taken in hand, and schools and colleges had been provided. Egypt, in short, had advanced an astonishingly long way on the road along which it had become the consuming passion of Lord Cromer's life to lead her; and this in spite of the manifold and thorny obstacles that blocked the way. A modern Moses, he led the people to the promised land; but the task of leadership was no ordinary one—one which brought out and exercised those qualities of mind and strengths of moral fibre which experience had already shown that Evelyn Baring possessed in ample measure.

Apart from the ineptitude of the Egyptian governing classes themselves, the two most formidable obstacles which stood in the way of reform were the financial instability of Egypt and the administrative control over the country exercised by the European Powers. Legislation had to be conducted by diplomacy. The President of the United States and the King of Sweden had to give their consent before the provisions of any new law could be applied to the subjects of the Emperor of Austria or the King of the Belgians, for in legislation by diplomacy unanimity among the diplomatic legislators was required; otherwise no legislation could take place. The system, as Lord Salisbury put it, was like the *liberum veto* of the Polish Diet, without the resource of cutting off the dissentient's head.<sup>1</sup> This was, indeed, a formidable impediment in the way of reform. "We are harassed at every

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 262.

turn by some international engagement," Baring told Lord Rosebery; and he dwelt on the nature of the *vis inertiae* which clogged the wheels and checked advance when in due course Lord Rosebery retired and Lord Iddesleigh took his place. They had to deal with a large foreign debt, with European Tribunals and, in fact, "with every sort of foreign exotic which has been grafted onto the barbarous native stock." And writing later with a wealth of experience behind him, he asserted that "for all purposes of action, administrative internationalism might be said to tend towards the creation of administrative impotence."<sup>1</sup> It was inevitable, therefore, that Baring should bend his energies to throwing off the incubus. "I send a memorandum on the very important point of what legislative authority might be substituted for the combined Cabinets of Europe and America who now legislate – or who refuse to legislate – for Egypt," he wrote on November the 7th, 1886. The task was one of no ordinary difficulty; it might have been rendered easier if the advice to guarantee an Egyptian loan, which he had consistently given to successive British Governments from the day when he had first been brought into direct contact with the financial problem of the country,<sup>2</sup> had been taken; for the control of the Powers was inextricably mixed up with the administration of finance. "Everything, except finance, is going on very well," he had told Lord Granville in December 1884. "I repeat what I have often said before – settle the financial business satisfactorily and in a very short time your Egyptian troubles will be practically over." But the advice was such that no British Government was prepared to take it. And when in 1885 a new loan of £9,000,000, guaranteed, not by Great Britain, but by the European Powers, was issued, the Commission of the Public Debt became an even more cosmopolitan body than it had been in the past, a German and a Russian Commissioner being

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> See back, Chapter VI., p. 66.

added to the English, French, Austrian, and Italian representatives. Unfailing tact was, consequently, an essential quality in the British representative if, in the circumstances of Egypt, crises of the first magnitude were to be avoided and progress of any sort was to be made ; and Baring's remarkable capacity for getting on well with men of different races and of widely varying temperaments was an asset of quite unusual value to his country at this time. "Barrère is behaving very well and giving no trouble," he wrote of the man of whom later he said that his departure had removed "the most active anglophobe" from Egypt. His anglophobia was, of course, but a reflection of the mind of the French Government. He was in Egypt to give effect to the policy of the Quai d'Orsay which was, as Baring himself reminded Lord Iddesleigh, to leave no stone unturned to render the task of Great Britain in Egypt impossible. "We had better make up our minds to the fact that we are not likely to solve the Egyptian question without passing through a state of serious tension with France. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

It would have been surprising indeed if Baring's own good temper had afforded a complete guarantee against hostile action on the part of one or other of the foreign representatives ; but when good temper failed he had other weapons in his armoury. "Please look at the despatch I am sending you by this mail," he begged Lord Granville on February the 4th, 1884, "about the meeting in connection with the Mixed Tribunals." No meeting had been in the least necessary, but Barrère was alive to the importance, from the point of view of France, of keeping to the fore the international principle. Well, then, let them have their meeting ; the British representative would be delighted to attend. "By smoking cigarettes for about the space of one hour in solemn silence, I threw such a gloom over the meeting – as they were all waiting for me to speak – that I expect nothing more of the kind will take place. I thought on the whole

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Iddesleigh, October 24th, 1886.

that this was a better plan than refusing to attend."

Similar qualities were called for in his relations with the Egyptian Government, for his position was an anomalous one, and wholly without precedent; and, unless he walked warily, some problem for which no apparent solution existed might at any time arise. Broadly stated, he told Lord Rosebery, the question which he bore constantly in mind was this: "When the English Government advises the Egyptian Government to adopt a certain course, and the latter declines to follow its advice, what is to be done?" If they were to have the *situation nette* for which people in Egypt were eternally clamouring, the question would eventually have to be answered in one of two ways—either the Egyptian Government would have to be accorded the same measure of independence as it possessed prior to the English occupation or "we must go forward in the direction of overtly taking a greater amount of power into our own hands." He thought that the force of circumstances would probably oblige them sooner or later to adopt the latter course; in the meantime, the only answer that he could give to the question was that they must prevent by every means in their power a crucial case from arising. If this was to be done, immense care had to be exercised. He could well understand that in London and Paris it was generally thought that when they wished anything done they had only to hold up their little fingers and the Egyptian Government would at once obey. This was very far from being a complete picture. He had always felt the extreme difficulty of conveying to "the several masters" whom he had served, an accurate idea of how the machine of Government in Egypt really worked. Might he try to put into as few words as possible a description for Lord Rosebery's consideration? No better description in so brief a compass is possible; it gives a clear-cut outline of the situation with which Baring was constantly confronted, and I transcribe it, therefore, for the information of the reader:



“ Broadly speaking, it may be said – and I hope you  
 “ will pardon the apparent egotism of the remark which  
 “ I am obliged to make for the sake of truth – that the  
 “ working of the whole machine depends, not on any  
 “ written instrument, or, indeed, on anything which is,  
 “ so to speak, tangible, but on the personal influence  
 “ which the English Consul-General can exert on the  
 “ Khedive, Nubar Pasha, and the leading officials serv-  
 “ ing under the Egyptian Government. In the vast  
 “ majority of cases I have found that this influence is suffi-  
 “ cient for all practical purposes. It has enabled me to  
 “ exercise a general and sufficiently effective supervision  
 “ over public affairs, to patch up the numerous quarrels  
 “ which occur, to smooth down personal jealousies,  
 “ and to suggest solutions for the frequent questions  
 “ which arise in this country which is the chosen home  
 “ of every kind of administrative and political paradox.  
 “ In actual practice it is not, generally speaking,  
 “ necessary for me to take the initiative. Neither is  
 “ it very difficult to keep in the background, so far as  
 “ the public are concerned, and to avoid any excessive  
 “ appearance of open and direct interference. I have  
 “ never yet come across an Egyptian who was not  
 “ inordinately afraid of taking responsibility. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

He added – a little superfluously, perhaps – that the machine was of a very fragile nature, and might easily be put out of gear. One crucial case had, indeed, arisen in January 1884, when Baring had made it known that contumacy on the part of the Khedive would bring about a re-enactment in the office of the President of the Council in Cairo of the scene which had been witnessed when Cromwell had removed the mace under the very noses of the scandalized but impotent Commoners in London. His display of decision on this occasion had solved the crisis ; that the unpleasant after-effects had been got over was due to Baring’s own winning personality. To be told that he must either *se soumettre ou se démettre* must, indeed, have been a bitter pill for the Egyptian Prime Minister, to swallow ; yet Chérif Pasha was not proof

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Rosebery, dated May 16th, 1886.

against the British Consul-General's extraordinary personal charm. "I gave him a dinner in honour of his dismissal," Baring had reported to Lord Granville. "He was much pleased and amused, being very much a *bon enfant*. I shall get on very well with Nubar," he had added.<sup>1</sup> And so he did for four years until a visit paid by Nubar Pasha to London early in 1888 brought him into contact with persons before whom he posed as "the earnest Egyptian patriot writhing in the grasp of a truculent Consul-General," and from whom he gained the impression that Great Britain was earnestly desirous of evacuating Egypt.

The experience was unfortunate, for he returned to Cairo in a rancorous frame of mind which Baring decided must be dealt with firmly. "A moment arrives with all these people," he told Lord Salisbury, "when one has to be very downright." On this occasion it was from home that a request for prudence came flashing over the wires. "I am very sorry you have had so much trouble with Nubar," Lord Salisbury wrote on February the 17th, 1888, "still more that you should attribute his action to the effects of his London visit. . . . But I have asked you by telegraph to try and manage to postpone any breach with him to a more convenient season. We are at this moment on the sharp ridge that separates the slopes towards war and peace. It is a matter of great uncertainty down which we shall slide ; but a very slight push either way will decide the issue, and the slide will be a tremendous one if we go towards war. . . . They [the French] are so unreasonable, and have so much incurable hatred of England, that I should dread any very glaring exhibition of our sovereignty in Egypt at this moment."<sup>2</sup> Lord Salisbury was quite prepared to support Baring if the necessity arose ; but he urged him to keep the peace for the time being, "because I do not wish our administration in Egypt to be the cause to which the long European

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated January 14th, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated February 17th, 1888.

war is to be ascribed by the future historian." Baring was nevertheless of opinion that this was an occasion on which prudence would best be served by firmness ; he spoke to the Khedive in " the plainest Anglo-French " he could command. And he was justified by the result. Questions which had been held up were suddenly carried through. " I shall, of course, not give the smallest hint that, for general diplomatic or Parliamentary reasons, we do not want to raise any difficult questions." To do so would be the height of imprudence. " The way to prevent an explosion is to show that we are the masters."

There was another class of persons which played an important part in the machinery of government – may be said, in fact, to have constituted the driving-wheel in the absence of which all other parts of the machine would have ceased revolving. Baring had told Lord Iddesleigh that it would be difficult to exaggerate the lack of capable native administrators ; he had done so in explanation of the necessity for employing Europeans in the more important departments under the native Ministers. The question of their relations with their chiefs which, as Lord Iddesleigh put it, was " more a matter of touch than of regulation," was, necessarily, a delicate one. Their relations with the British Consul-General were equally delicate, and were to an even greater extent a matter of " touch " rather than of regulation. " I had to work through British agents over whom I possessed no control save that based on personal authority and moral suasion."<sup>1</sup> Men of the highest professional qualifications were required combined with great force of character and an unusual capacity for self-effacement. In addition to other qualifications, the Englishman in the Egyptian service was expected to speak French and to possess a constitution capable of standing the rigours of the climate. It was, in fact, a case, as Baring told Lord Granville, of Leech's well-known caricature of the horse-dealer – " I know what you want, sir ; sound in wind and limb, quiet

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 325.

to ride and drive, has carried a lady, and all for £25 – and don't you wish you may get him." Baring hoped that he might get men of the type required ; but he did not disguise from himself the difficulty of doing so. The sort of men required were not easily to be found in any country, and when they were found they generally had something better to do than take service in Egypt on salaries of from £1,500 to £2,000 a year, on which they would be able to live about as comfortably as they would on half the income in England. What was required of these paragons when they had been found was that they should keep in the background and work through the Egyptian Ministers. This was no doubt an irksome task, and it is scarcely surprising that European officials placed in such a position should have been apt to forget that they were the servants and not the masters of the Egyptian Government. " Generally speaking," Baring wrote, " the Englishman is not content to hide his light under a bushel – far from it. He wishes to have his good deeds described at length in the columns of the newspapers, and takes practical steps to arrive at this object."<sup>1</sup> Yet the debt which Egypt owed to the European officers who enlisted under her banner was an almost incalculable one. " Everything in the nature of administrative and financial progress here depends wholly on the Europeans in the Egyptian service."<sup>2</sup>

They would themselves, I think, be the first to admit that for the many successes that stand to their credit they were indebted in no small measure to the ability and tact and the wise guidance exercised by Evelyn Baring. With equal candour they would probably admit – looking back over the days of storm and stress during which the new Egypt came to birth – that there had been occasions

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Iddesleigh, October 24th, 1886.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Iddesleigh, October 24th, 1886. No one could wish for a finer tribute to the enterprising spirit of the British people than is to be found in the long list of names of those who thus served Egypt. Milner, Vincent – now Lord D'Abernon – Gorst and Clinton Dawkins, Grenfell, Kitchener, Wingate and Maxwell, Scott-Moncrieff and Garstin, are but a few chosen at random of those who took service under successive Egyptian Governments and played their part in the creation of modern Egypt.

enough on which they had given him cause to blaspheme. "If you have an opportunity," he asked Lord Rosebery one day in May 1886, "would you mind saying a word to the Duke of Cambridge about the necessity of considering, not only the Cairo, but the Alexandria Command, from the point of view of tact and knowledge of the world besides military fitness?" The officer then in command, who was "not a man of much judgment," had insisted on the English guard staying in the new Palais de Justice which was about to be occupied by the Mixed Courts. "I have settled it all now, but we narrowly escaped a quarrel with the judges, who would all have been backed up by their diplomatic Agents."

It was, perhaps, inevitable that in the circumstances of Egypt the soldier and the civilian should not always see eye to eye. "The Suakin question really comes to this," Baring told a correspondent: "How are Kitchener and Wylde to be made to live together in peace in a very small place which is also very hot? At present I cannot answer this question. . . . I do not think Wylde should write petitions for natives to me abusing Kitchener." About the same time a young and brilliant English civilian in the employ of the Egyptian Government published a Report without informing the Prime Minister of his intention of doing so. Baring was himself strongly opposed to unnecessary advertisement of what they were doing in Egypt, since he held the view that the less attention they attracted in England the better were their chances of making real progress. And he considered that the Report in question contained many things which, even if correct, had much better not have been said in a published document. The published Report had been followed by another – confidential in character and highly indiscreet in substance – which the official in question had submitted to Nubar Pasha himself, and which the Prime Minister in his turn had forwarded to the British Consul-General. Since the Report

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Hon. E. Barrington, April 3rd, 1887.

attributed to the British Government views of the Egyptian Government little flattering to them, Baring remitted it to Lord Rosebery in case he might wish the views attributed to the Government to be repudiated.

“ Vincent has succeeded in lashing Nubar into a frenzy, and he (Nubar) talks of resigning. I do not much care about this, as I am accustomed to it. When Clifford Lloyd was here he resigned every ten days or so. During the last three or four months he has only expressed a wish to resign once. That was when Moncrieff, by some muddle, left Cairo without any water for a few hours. But I do not want him to get into this state again. He is very excitable, and when he has what he calls a *crise nerveuse* becomes difficult to manage.”

Lord Rosebery agreed with Baring – “ I have written Vincent an admonition. His Report made my hair stand on end. However, I hope he will settle down now and remember that he is an official of the Egyptian Government and not a sort of High Commissioner of the Universe.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1888, Baring found difficulty in finding an Englishman of the exact type required to serve under the Minister for the Interior. He put forward the name of a distinguished soldier, who in due course was interviewed by Nubar Pasha. The candidate's report of the interview made to the Consul-General was not encouraging – “ As a result of my last interview with Nubar Pasha and the Khedive, I have informed them that I am not prepared to take up the work of public security or any position at the Ministry of the Interior ; after hearing my views they agreed with the propriety of this decision.” No wonder ; for, as Baring told Lord Salisbury, the candidate had been “ very honest but not very diplomatic.” He had put the matter to his prospective employers in this way. If he was to be completely subordinate to the native Minister, the place was not good enough for him ; but if what they

<sup>1</sup> Lord Rosebery to Sir E. Baring, May 21st, 1886.

wanted was a strong man to guide and dominate them, he was the man for them ! What Baring wanted was something between these two extremes. He was a little disappointed. Some measure of European control was very desirable ; but the iron hand must not be seen through the velvet glove. " Some of the Englishmen here," he confided to Lord Salisbury, " are excellent public servants, but they are occasionally rather wanting in elasticity of mind."

### CHAPTER XIII

#### THE VICISSITUDES OF 1887

IT will be clear from what has been said in the last chapter that, while the elimination of the question of the Sudan from the current problems of Egypt had eased the situation and had opened out a vista of hope for all who, like Baring himself, looked forward to the regeneration of Egypt under the ægis of Great Britain, some formidable difficulties had still to be surmounted. Sir H. Drummond Wolff was still engaged in his negotiations with the Turkish representative, and so long as the negotiations were in progress an engagement on the part of Great Britain to place a definite term to her occupation remained a menacing and unpalatable possibility. Only on the assumption that Great Britain remained in Egypt could Baring picture the moral and material desert which the land had become under the rule of the Pashas, blossoming into the home of a prosperous, a civilized, and a contented people. "We are at present a long way from having a sound system of administration according to European ideas," he told Lord Iddesleigh in October 1886, "and, if we withdraw, we had much better not try to introduce one. It would crumble to pieces the day after our departure."

Could this be made as clear as it was to him in Egypt to fugitive Governments at home, preoccupied as they were with the increasing complexities which the closing decades of the nineteenth century were introducing into an external situation which grew in menace and expanded in extent, lapping over the boundaries of Europe, sweeping across Asia to the confines of the Far East, and embracing as it surged headily forward even the Western hemisphere as well? That was the question which



intruded itself constantly upon Baring's thoughts as he went forward with his work by day, that threaded its way through the meditations with which he burdened the night watches—a baffling question the answer to which lay wrapped in an obscurity which gave rise to exasperating and corroding doubt. He knew how great was the pressure brought to bear upon the Government at home. M. Herbette, the French Ambassador in Berlin, who spoke with all the knowledge and authority of a former *directeur politique* at the Quai d'Orsay, had pointedly let it be known that British troubles in Egypt were due to the refusal of the British Government to fix a term to their occupation of the country. Let them only name a day for the evacuation and the *corvée* should be abolished, the capitulations reformed, the Press law passed. “Meanwhile,” Lord Salisbury told Evelyn Baring, “the Iron Chancellor is hinting that if we do not behave well he will give the French their heads.”<sup>1</sup>

Burdened with anxiety born of these uncertainties, Baring gave increasingly vigorous expression to his feelings. His despatches lost something of their urbanity; they gained considerably in incisiveness. In England, Ministers reacted according to their temperament to the forceful manner of his approach. Some, conscious, perhaps, of the depth of their representative's understanding of the intricacies of the Egyptian problem compared with the shallow waters of their own knowledge, imbibed often enough during a transitory sojourn at the Foreign Office, temporized. “Sir Evelyn Baring angry—must be quieted,” was the comment written by Lord Iddesleigh across one of Baring's less amiable communications. Others with greater assurance took up the challenge in the spirit in which it was flung down. “I do not admit the want of support,” Lord Salisbury telegraphed in answer to a reproachful message from Cairo. “. . . I spoke as strongly to M. Waddington as I could decently do to an Ambassador.” But there

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 4th, 1887.

were times when even Lord Salisbury displayed an unwonted meekness. Impatient of departmental delay, Baring, in February 1887, despatched over the wires a peremptory request for attention :

“ Pray let me have an early answer to my official  
“ telegram of to-day. I need hardly say that I shall  
“ do my best, as I have always done, to carry out  
“ whatever decisions the Government may take;”  
“ but the situation now created here is one of extreme  
“ difficulty, and I look to some support and assistance  
“ from home.”<sup>1</sup>

Lord Salisbury fell back upon the soft answer that turneth away wrath :

“ Your telegram of yesterday shall be considered  
“ immediately.”

Indeed, at this time it was the incumbents at the Treasury rather than at the Foreign Office who gave Baring cause for muttered blasphemy. As in the 'seventies, so in the 'eighties, the Egyptian problem was fundamentally a financial one. The disaster in the Sudan had imposed a heavy burden upon the Egyptian Treasury ; unless the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his advisers at Whitehall could be persuaded to modify their attitude on the subject of the liability of the Egyptian Government for military expenditure in connection both with the army of occupation and the reorganized Egyptian forces, the aftermath of the Sudan imbroglio seemed likely to be a failure on the part of the Egyptian Government to meet the interest on the public debt. Such an eventuality was almost certain to be followed by a fresh Commission of Inquiry and a further tightening of international control. Farewell, if that were so, to Baring's most deeply cherished aspirations ; at all costs, therefore, must such an eventuality be avoided. “ You may be sure that I shall fight to the death against an International Commission,” he told Mr. Goschen in February 1887.

<sup>1</sup> Telegram to Lord Salisbury, February 10th, 1887.

But how was this to be done? The question became a crucial one when, early in 1887, Baring discovered that the view of the British Treasury as to the liability of the British taxpayer for the cost of military expenditure in Egypt differed profoundly from the view which prevailed in Egypt itself. In its details the matter was one of extraordinary complexity. The intricacies of Egyptian finance were so great in 1887 as to puzzle even the expert. Notwithstanding his general power of dealing with figures, Mr. Goschen felt himself in an "inextricable labyrinth." He begged that Evelyn Baring would let him know how the figures came out in "a simple form." Baring confessed his inability to do so — "You ask what, amidst all these labyrinthine figures, is the real result of 1886? I wish to goodness I could tell you. I enclose the eighteen different solutions of the Accountant-General, but I strongly recommend you not to attempt to understand them."

Where the experts failed the layman is scarcely likely to fare better. Fortunately, there is no need to make the attempt. The figures are of less importance than the principle; and the principle for which Baring fought with all the strength and tenacity of which he was capable was this — that since the abnormal military expenditure in Egypt was due in the main to British policy, the British Government were in honour bound to bear a reasonable share of it. The whole financial control of the Egyptian army had been virtually taken over by the British authorities, and a much larger force than Baring considered necessary had been maintained in Egypt. In these circumstances it never occurred to him that the British Treasury would repudiate all liability for the cost. Disillusionment came early in February 1887, in the shape of a letter from Lord Salisbury:

"Mr. Goschen takes a very strong objection to the  
"sort of vague reliance on the British Budget which  
"has, very naturally, prevailed of late among Egyptian  
"financiers. He says that your existing claims are

“ untenable in themselves, and are much more objectionable in that they are evidently destined to be the parents of a long and healthy line of little claims in the future. Therefore, as you will hear by telegraph, he has cut into your Budget with a sharp knife. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

To this unexpected announcement Baring made a forceful reply by telegram. Lord Salisbury was clearly taken by surprise ; from the tone of his reply it might almost be assumed that his comment on the departmental file was in terms similar to those with which Lord Iddesleigh had ridden an earlier storm – “ Sir Evelyn Baring angry – must be quieted ” –

“ We were much distressed at the preliminary telegram we received yesterday morning. It never was in our minds to produce so much dismay in the Anglo-Egyptian official world as we apparently have done. . . . The Treasury – I mean the permanent officials – have all along been in favour of refusing any payment whatever from this side and taking the chance of an International Commission.”

Lord Salisbury made it clear that the Cabinet must not be assumed to be converts to the Treasury view ; but he stressed the difficulties of the position from the Government’s point of view :

“ In considering the financial question you must not forget the extreme difficulty we have in persuading the House of Commons to incur any expense about Egypt. The pressure of taxation here is very heavy. Motions in the direction of economy will unite many who ordinarily vote apart, and the decision of the House on such points cannot be confidently foretold.”<sup>2</sup>

It may be safely said that nothing could have been better calculated to confirm Baring in the attitude which he had taken up than the indifference displayed by the

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 4th, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated February 11th, 1887.

British Treasury to the possible appointment of an International Commission. In Egypt, irritation against the British Government was very great, he told Sir H. Drummond Wolff, because they had decided to throw the greater part of the military expenditure of 1886 and the whole of the expenditure of 1887 on Egypt; and he took up the cudgels with Mr. Goschen, who had recently succeeded Lord Randolph Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Goschen admitted that Baring had a grievance in that successive Governments in England had refrained from facing, and, consequently, from coming to a decision upon, the question of liability. He himself had been "startled indeed" when, on taking office, he had heard of a suggested supplementary estimate of £600,000 for the Egyptian army besides the extra cost of the English troops in Egypt. He was hampered by the fact to which Lord Salisbury had called attention, namely, that the House of Commons would not stand it. "A debate would not be sustained on the issue that we ought to contribute to make up deficiencies in the Egyptian Conventional Budget in order to avoid an inquiry."<sup>1</sup>

The correspondence which ensued is interesting, since it shows how strongly Baring felt on the whole question. He was embittered by the impending conclusion of the Wolff Convention which, it was now clear, was to provide for an early evacuation of the country. Perhaps, after all, Baring flashed in an unwonted fit of ill humour, this was the best solution of the Egyptian question, since the task which he had grown to think had been assigned by Providence to the British people appeared in existing circumstances to be impossible of accomplishment.

"The result of four years of Egyptian experience has sunk two points deeply into my mind. The first that, in the present phase of our Parliamentary institutions, it is almost hopeless to conduct to a successful issue a task such as that we have undertaken in

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 11th, 1887.

“ Egypt. The second is that the English administrative machine appears to be singularly ill-adapted to undertake the task. There appears to be no cohesion among the London Departments. Each seems to work independently, with the result that I hear sometimes the voice of the Foreign Office, sometimes that of the Treasury, sometimes that of the War Office, speaking to me in words that are by no means always identic. We had better retire from the scene as soon as we can do so with dignity.”<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Goschen was not, however, indisposed to meet the Consul-General's views so far as the exigencies of the Parliamentary situation in England permitted. The question of the reduction of the army of occupation so as to lighten the financial load was being carefully considered, he told Baring, towards the end of February. But here the unsuitability of the English administrative machine, of which Baring had so recently complained, made itself felt.

“ I am having very great difficulties about the military reductions,” Baring replied on March the 7th, “ the financiers pressing one way and the soldiers the other. The utterances of the English War Office, and especially Mr. Smith's letter to Grenfell, are so oracular that I think they must have been written with special reference to the presence of the Sphinx in Egypt. So far as I can understand, we are expected to reduce the military expenditure, but *not* to reduce the army. I cannot read this riddle, *Davus sum non Œdipus*. The process of making bricks without straw has been tried once before on the banks of the Nile, but it was not very successful.”

Not the least of his grievances against the Government at home was that they forced him into a false position. While he was their representative, they drove him by the rigidity of their attitude into the position of an advocate of the Egyptian Government. His primary duty was to

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. Goschen, March 5th, 1887.

ascertain the views of the Government at home and then to make the best case he could for them – “and I can assure you,” he told Mr. Goschen, “that in the course of the last four years I have occasionally had to use some very queer arguments to support them.”

The spring of 1887 was, indeed, a period of almost unrelieved gloom for Evelyn Baring. As a result of the Wolff negotiations it was now clear that the Government were prepared to enter into an engagement to withdraw from Egypt at the end of a definite period. Under the terms of the Convention actually signed in Constantinople on May the 22nd, it was agreed that unless there appeared to be danger in the interior, or from without, Her Britannic Majesty's Government would definitely withdraw their troops from Egypt at the expiration of three years. Baring may have pinned some slight hope to “the appearance of danger in the interior or from without,” to save the situation; with the successor of the Mahdi, the Khalifa Abdullah, still at large, there was always the possibility of danger from the south. “I am rather concerned at the state of things up the Nile,” he told Lord Salisbury a little later on. “The Dervishes are beginning to give trouble, and some of the inhabitants of Aswan have found out that they ought to pray six times a day instead of five – in fact, that Khalifa Abdullah is the High Priest of the Prophet. I fear we shall have some trouble. . . .” But, in face of the obvious trend of British policy, his hope can have been but a slight one, and it seemed to him that the best that he could now do was to straighten out the financial tangle so that the path of the Egyptian Government would be as free from thorns as possible after the departure of the British. Not the least of the difficulties in the way of doing so – so long, at any rate, as the British Treasury refused reasonable aid – was due to the fact that nearly every important financial question had a political as well as an administrative aspect. The customs revenue, for example, could no doubt be increased by prohibiting the cultivation of tobacco in

Egypt ; but such an action would be hotly opposed in the Legislative Council, and would prove very unpopular in the country. " I know that the Treasury officials at home will scorn these arguments," he told Mr. Goschen, " but I cannot afford to do so. My first duty now – still more when the English army leaves – is to keep my Egyptian Humpty Dumpty on the top of the wall somehow."

The best means of keeping Humpty Dumpty on the top of the wall was to pull the finances of the country together and to hand them over in a state of reasonable order on our departure from Egypt. But if the finances were to be seriously taken up, he hoped that the advice of himself and of others on the spot would not be neglected as it had been in 1884. " We have had quite enough pedantic tinkering from the London and Paris Treasuries," he complained in a letter to Mr. Vincent. " For Heaven's sake let us do something now which is practical." His own view of what should be aimed at was simple and clear cut. Let them establish the best financial administration of which the circumstances would admit ; let them sweep away the absurd and complicated arrangements about the application of surplus ; let the *Caisse* keep enough to pay the coupons and hand over the balance to the Egyptian Treasury to be dealt with under competent financial advice, as the Egyptian Government thought desirable ; let the position of the Financial Adviser – an Englishman – be strengthened and defined ; let all the trumpery little sinking funds which did no good, but which were a source of infinite trouble, be given up. If these things were done, he knew what he would do, if he stood in the shoes of the Egyptian Minister. " Personally, if I were Egyptian Finance Minister," he told Mr. Goschen, " I would not pay off a farthing of debt ; but, directly I had a real solid surplus, I would borrow more money for canals and roads."<sup>1</sup>

How were all these things to be done in face of the

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated May 9th, 1887.



hostility of the French? Their animosity was being displayed at the moment in connection with Baring's strenuous attempts to put an end to forced labour – the hated *corvée* – which, whether or not it could claim credit for the amazing structures of the pyramids, had scourged the people of the Nile valley from the days of the Pharaohs onwards. Like all the other problems of Egypt, it was *au fond* a financial one. Year by year the circumstances of Egypt demanded that labour be called out to clear the canal bottoms of the mud left by the rise of the Nile. Unless this was done, the proper distribution of water, on which the crops of Egypt depended, could not be guaranteed. There was only one alternative to forced labour and that was free labour; and unless free labour was paid it would not be forthcoming. With a Budget already threatening a serious deficit, the prospect of finding the money was gloomy indeed. It was still further reduced by Mr. Goschen's pruning-knife. And since in the eyes of the French the sufferings of the Egyptian peasantry weighed lightly in the scale against the interests of the French bondholders, they derived no little satisfaction from vetoing a reform which the English Consul-General was particularly anxious to carry through. In London "the master of jibes and jeers" showed signs of viewing their action with a certain cynical amusement. "As you will, therefore" – on account of Mr. Goschen's pruning operations – "not be able to pay the money registered for your *corvée* abolition, it is quite a providence that the French decline to allow it to be carried out."<sup>1</sup>

Baring viewed the matter in a different light. If the French were not to be persuaded, he would shame them into acquiescence. He decided that a notification calling out the *corvée* should be issued, and the reasons for the notification publicly and officially stated. Such a notification was in fact issued, and Baring's judgment was vindicated by the result. "D'Aunay never believed we should act," he told Lord Salisbury, "and is now greatly

<sup>1</sup> Lord Salisbury to Sir E. Baring, February 4th, 1887.

surprised and disconcerted." Realizing the unpopularity in which his Government was likely to be involved if the labour was actually called out, the French Consul-General temporized ; he would withdraw his opposition provided the public works expenditure was placed under the control of the Commissioners of the Debt. To this condition Baring had not the smallest intention of agreeing. Why should he ? As the opening weeks of 1887 passed and the contents of Sir Henry Drummond Wolff's Convention became known, he became increasingly scornful of any tendency on the part of the British Government to show deference to the susceptibilities of the French. Had they not made it known that if only we would fix a term to the period of our occupation, our troubles in Egypt, so far as they were concerned, would disappear ? Well, we had fixed a date for our departure ; why not insist, then, on their fulfilling the promises which they had given ? Why not call on them to assist us in establishing a state of things which would permit the Government to be carried on after our departure ?

The year 1887, which had dawned so darkly, was destined, nevertheless, to constitute a turning-point in the history of England in Egypt. The striking change for the better was due in part to what Baring regarded as the providential refusal of the Sultan to ratify the Wolff Convention. But it was also due in no small measure to the ability and pertinacity with which he himself pressed his views on the Government at home. Sentences in the letters which he received both from Lord Salisbury and from Mr. Goschen give an interesting indication of the impression which his tenacity was making. " The question of the reduction of the English army of occupation, so as to save you a portion of the £200,000 included in the Budget, is being most carefully examined," the Chancellor of the Exchequer wrote towards the end of February ; and a month later, " I am pressing the War Office to re-examine the question of the actual cost of occupation." And a little later still, with regard to the interest on the

Suez Canal shares due to Great Britain, "I shall not calculate on it in my Budget." On April the 1st, Lord Salisbury wrote :

"I have telegraphed to-day suggesting that you should send Vincent home. The financial crisis is of great importance, and it is most important that we should avoid any possible mistakes. We have to fit the Egyptian Budget within the narrow margins that international jealousies have allowed, and to do that without burdening the British taxpayer. The task is not, I believe, impossible, especially as there are certain points on which these conditions can be stretched - Suez Canal shares, Suakin expenditure, cost of occupation, and others. It is very necessary to adjust these questions carefully, and much can be explained by word of mouth which it is difficult to explain in writing and still more by telegram. . . . If he comes, I hope he will bring with him your and Nubar's full views as to Suakin. For English reasons it must be kept by Egypt - slave trade grounds among them ; but so far as the reasons are English and not Egyptian, Egypt ought not to pay for them."

He added a few days later : "I have read your financial despatch with great but rather sad interest. It is terribly clear."

The more sympathetic attitude of the British Government was not the only favourable factor which developed during the year 1887 ; for the finances of Egypt themselves improved, and as they did so the prospect of a crisis gradually passed. Baring realized to the full how much he and Egypt owed to Mr. Vincent for the gratifying change in the situation, and he paid him a generous and well-merited tribute - "I cannot, indeed, express too strongly my sense of the ability with which he (Vincent) has been recently conducting financial affairs," he told Lord Salisbury in January of the following year. "He has been most successful ; and the success is entirely due to him, for I have interfered very little." Thus the clouds amidst which the year had dawned gradually

dispersed. By the end of the year the threat of further foreign interference in the affairs of Egypt had receded into the background once more, while the Egyptian Prime Minister, who had been lukewarm in his opposition to a further Commission of Inquiry so long as the outcome of the financial difficulty remained in doubt, had been persuaded to associate himself publicly with the English view. "The Consuls-General smarted under Nubar's statement that an International Commission would have *des conséquences désastreuses* for Egypt," Baring told Mr. Goschen. "I am not, however, sorry to see Nubar publicly pinned to this. . . ." But perhaps the greatest triumph of all was the abolition – in principle at any rate, if not yet wholly in fact – of the *corvée*. In Baring's estimation this was one of the outstanding boons conferred by Great Britain on the Egyptian people. "There are a few important landmarks in the history of Egyptian administration," he wrote at a later date, "and this is one of them. . . . The British Government had practically pledged their word that this particular Egyptian abomination should cease. Retracting was no longer possible. . . . Amongst the many achievements which England has accomplished in the cause of suffering humanity, not the least praiseworthy is this act, that in the teeth of strong opposition the Anglo-Saxon race insisted that the Egyptian labourer should be paid for his work, and that he should not be flogged if he did not wish to work."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., pp. 415 and 416.

## CHAPTER XIV

### AN IMPORTUNATE PROCONSUL

**E**VEN those most closely associated with Evelyn Baring in his work in Egypt were not a little surprised at the vigour and pertinacity with which he pressed his plea for alleviation from the payments due from the Egyptian to the British Exchequer. Was his judgment in any way at fault?

It may well be that he under-estimated somewhat the difficulties of the Parliamentary situation in England ; but that, after all, was the affair of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in London, and, looked at solely from the point of view of the position of England in Egypt, his policy in pressing for the reduction was unquestionably sound. It was based on conclusions drawn from a broad survey of the teachings of history on the subject of the relations of an Imperial Power with those over whom it exercised dominion. His study of the history of the ancient world furnished him with object-lessons of peculiar value now, when the people of Great Britain found themselves faced with problems not dissimilar from those with which the people of Rome had had to deal twenty centuries or so before. What, he asked himself, were the strengths and what the weaknesses of the Imperialism of those earlier days? Could the former be enhanced and the latter avoided in the Imperialism which had been forced upon Great Britain in the nineteenth century? One glaring weakness there was, as it seemed to him, in the Imperialism of ancient Rome, and that was the calculatingly commercial view which the governing race took of its relations with the governed. "The tribute was fixed at a high figure, not merely in order to obtain money, but also with a view

to crippling the resources of the conquered nation and preventing them from renewing the struggle for independence." And the tribute was a double evil, because its collection afforded those who were charged with the duty of collecting it opportunities for making further exactions on their own account. "Varus," he reminds us in an essay on "Ancient and Modern Imperialism," "went, a poor man, as Governor to Syria, and in two years became a millionaire." The evil did not, indeed, end here; for where the tax-gatherer was, there was the usurer to be found also.

This particular weakness of the Imperialism of ancient Rome had been a marked feature of the Imperialism of the Ottoman Empire in its relations with its vassal, Egypt. In the days of Ismail Pasha immediately prior to the British occupation, the tax-gatherer had been frequently accompanied by a staff of usurers who bought up the crops of the cultivators in advance, at prices which were ruinous to the latter. Here, then, was a weakness which could be avoided; one which he was determined should be avoided, for nothing so stirred him to wrath and indignation as the callous exploitation of a long-suffering and a helpless people. His was, indeed, a singularly altruistic spirit. For personal credit he cared nothing; and, but for his compassion for the sufferings of his fellow men, his altruism would have approached the level of selflessness depicted as the supreme ideal of human conduct in the loftiest teaching of the philosophic thinkers of the East.<sup>1</sup>

"All offices – and this not less than others," Lord Rosebery wrote when Foreign Secretary, in December 1893, "bring one into constant contact with the "baser side of human nature; with the egotism, the "self-seeking, the attempt to hatch the addled egg "of a career. It has, therefore, been an encourage- "ment and a refreshment to become connected with "a man: one who puts self entirely on one side. . . . "I hope and think that you must find some recompense

<sup>1</sup> Notably in the Bhagavad Gita.

“in the consciousness of having done your duty and  
“having raised yourself to a signal altitude in the  
“minds of those who know the facts. For my part,  
“I take off my hat to you with a new sense of respect  
“for your character and standard.”

His way of life fell short of—or, should it not rather be said, rose superior to?—the philosophic detachment, the coldly impersonal performance of duty of the man who acts solely in obedience to a Kantian categorical imperative, simply by reason of his consuming desire to benefit those over whose lot he was able to exercise some measure of control.

His sympathy for the peasantry dated back to his early days in India as private secretary to Lord Northbrook, when he had had personal experience of those famines which periodically scourge the land and throw into sharp relief the narrow margin between starvation and existence and the precarious hold upon life of great masses of the people. His sympathy for the Egyptian people had been sharpened by the knowledge which he had acquired of the Sadistic lusts and inhumanities of their masters the Khedives. With his highly developed historical sense he pictured in vivid outline the panorama of Egyptian history, and, as the long and chequered scroll unrolled itself before him, he saw always in the forefront of the picture a down-trodden and a sorely tried people, the victims of the greed, the tyranny, and the arrogance of an unbroken succession of alien rulers. Persians, Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Turks, and French had followed one another down the age-long flights of Egyptian history. The rulers had changed, but the lot of the ruled had remained the same—to crouch under the iron heel of callous and tyrannical masters. So it had been in the beginning; so it had remained to the end. The rule of the Khedives had shown no improvement on the days of grinding oppression and misery which had attended the authority of the Turkish and Mameluke Sultans who had preceded them.

Nothing, indeed, could have exceeded the vanity, the cupidity, the moral depravity, and the ferocious inhumanity of the Viceroys who ruled Egypt during the greater part of the nineteenth century. On finding a slave-girl smoking a cigarette in the precincts of the harem, Abbas I had given orders for her mouth to be sewn up and then, with cold-blooded indifference to human suffering, had left her to die of starvation. For merely striking a dog of which he had become fond, he had caused a servant to be bricked up alive in the precincts of his palace. In the soil which he thus watered with the blood and the tears of anguished humanity the basest passions of the human heart grew and flourished in rank luxuriance. It was but poetic justice that Abbas I, Viceroy of Egypt, should have met his own death at the hands of an assassin—a death so horrible in its manner and so sickening in its details that Baring could never bring himself to commit it to writing even in a record of the most confidential character.

Abbas I had been succeeded by Said, whose callous indifference to the sanctity of human life had been exhibited on one occasion in the course of a journey up the Nile. Having had pointed out to him what appeared to be an unusually fine cluster of dates hanging from a tree on the river-bank, Said had maintained that it was a human being. On his companions expressing doubt, the Viceroy had picked up a rifle and fired at the object, and when a man had fallen dead to the ground had merely remarked, "You see, I was right."

Said's successor, Ismail, who was at the height of his prodigal reign when Baring first set foot in Egypt, displayed a similar contempt for the sanctity of human life. When, on one occasion, a religious impostor had proclaimed himself to be the Mahdi, Ismail had caused his village to be surrounded and set on fire. The whole of the inhabitants, without regard to age or sex, had then been shot down as they issued from the flames. And to cruelty, in his case, were added a rapacity and



dishonesty almost beyond belief. Of him Baring himself wrote that "honesty of every kind was banished from the tainted precincts of his Court," and that "the pages of Apuleius or Petronius must be searched to find any counterpart to the lubricity which accompanied many of his orgies." His extravagance was almost incredible; he is said to have spent £100,000 merely on the staircase of the Ghizeh palace. And the vast sums that he required to enable him to prosecute his whims and satisfy his lusts were wrung from the unfortunate people. Baring once recalled the fact that one of the Viscontis boasted, in the days of the Italian despots, that he was the only robber in his dominions. "Ismail," commented Baring, "could make no such boast. He allowed the Pasha to rob the sheikh and the sheikh to rob the *fellahin*, and he put a whip into their hands to aid in the process of spoliation." Had any spur been required to rouse to action the love of justice and the hatred of iniquity deeply rooted in his nature, it would have been found in the devastating rule of the Khedives.

The boon that he was capable of conferring, and did, in fact, confer upon the down-trodden and the oppressed, was offered in no expectation of reward in the shape of any excessive political gratitude on the part of those upon whom it was bestowed; for his reading of history and his knowledge of the world had taught him the truth of Bacon's maxim that it is well-nigh impossible for one nation to feel gratitude for the blessings conferred on it by another. Rome, he recalled, had been invited to become the champion of Hellenic freedom in Asia Minor; yet, when the assistance asked for had been given, it had soon been found, to quote the words of Mommsen, that "the most detestable form of Macedonian rule was less fraught with evil for Greece than a free constitution springing from the noblest intentions of honourable foreigners." And Baring's own conclusions, drawn from long experience in the service of the State, were couched in similar terms — "It is, indeed, one of the inevitable incidents of the

execution of an Imperial policy, that as a political force, the gratitude shown to the foreigner who relieves oppression is of a very ephemeral character. We have learned this lesson both in India and in Egypt."<sup>1</sup>

It was his attachment to the humanism enshrined in the teaching of Christianity that impelled him forward on his often thankless task; yet he was no maudlin sentimentalist, for he possessed in ample measure the hard sense of realities that is inimical to cant and repudiates the whole tribe of visionaries, cranks, and faddists. He was wary of the philanthropist, who was only too apt to be tainted with "the zeal which outruns discretion and with the want of accuracy which often characterizes those whose emotions predominate over their reason."<sup>2</sup> He was not without experience of such persons, for among those who interested themselves in the affairs of Egypt was that stormy petrel and wayward apostle of lost causes, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.

The particular bee in Blunt's Egyptian bonnet was an irrational admiration, not for the Egyptian people, but for the Egyptian Arab whose attractions to most impartial observers were much less strikingly apparent. For the Copt, the most essentially Egyptian of all the inhabitants of the Nile valley, he had no fondness; nor did he betray any great love either for the Christian or the Musulman Syrian. The ruling aristocracy of Turkish, Armenian, Algerian, and other descent he particularly disliked. His platform was, therefore, not "Egypt for the Egyptians," but "Egypt for the Egyptian Arabs." And in pursuit of this impracticable ideal he expended a vast amount of gratuitous energy. Why, he wanted to know, were not representatives of the Egyptian Arabs — Ulemas, members of the El Azhar Mosque, orthodox exponents of the Sheriat or sacred Islamic law — in control of the Government of the country? The question was one which

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient and Modern Imperialism*, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *The Government of Subject Races*, first published in the *Edinburgh Review*, January 1908.

he propounded to many people, amongst them Lord Salisbury. For once Lord Salisbury was nonplussed ; he delayed replying, and then he decided to seek advice. " I have received - some time ago - " he told Evelyn Baring, " a letter from Mr. Wilfrid Blunt. I do not quite know what to do with it. Perhaps the best solution from my perplexity that can be suggested is to send it on to you - of course quite unofficially." Baring found little difficulty in answering the question. The main reason why so little could be done in the way of associating the class of person whom Wilfrid Blunt championed with the Government of the country was that Blunt's description of modern Egypt as a Muslim country was only partially correct.

" Egypt," Baring was at pains to explain in his reply to Lord Salisbury, " is a nondescript country. Take away the Suez Canal, the railways, the telegraph to Europe, the European Colonies and trade, the Capitulations, the External Debt, and the Mixed Tribunals ; make Blunt English Consul-General, and a Government such as he would have, might work. It would be more superstitious, rapacious, ignorant, and corrupt than that of the Turkish aristocracy which he wishes to supplant, and about whom, in spite of many faults, some slight traditional trace of governing capacity still lingers. But it would not be altogether unsuitable to the population which, under these conditions, would alone remain to be governed. Amongst other reforms which would then be effected, the low-class Levantine would no longer continue ' the ungodly pursuit ' of keeping a public-house. He would disappear, as in 1881, ' as if by magic,' although the magic would not, and in 1881 did not, consist in the hallowing influence of the Ulema, as Blunt fantastically imagines, but rather in a very well-founded belief on the part of the publican that he would get his head broken by some impecunious creditor to whom, in his habitual character of usurer, he had advanced money. Under present conditions, however, I should regard a proposal to make one of Blunt's friends Ruler or Prime Minister of Egypt, as little less absurd than

“ the nomination of some savage Red Indian Chief to be  
 “ Governor-General of Canada.”

It must not be supposed that, because he rejected Blunt's proposals as chimerical, he was at enmity with the adherents of the orthodox school of Islam which found a focus for its activities in the mosque and university of El Azhar. On the contrary, his personal relations with them left nothing to be desired ; and the question of their closer association with the work of government was one to which he gave much anxious thought, for he realized the importance of rallying them to the Government. But the difficulties in the way were too great :

“ Apart from the fact that I should probably do more  
 “ harm than good if I began to tamper with the Sheriat,  
 “ I cannot move in the matter without doing grave  
 “ injury to the authority of the Khedive and the  
 “ Egyptian Ministers, which is, above all things, what I  
 “ want to avoid. Burke, I think, says somewhere that  
 “ it is no inconsiderable part of a wise politician's duty  
 “ to decide on what abuses should not be reformed.  
 “ That is a maxim which everyone connected with  
 “ Eastern government should lay to heart. I have no  
 “ idea how an inscrutable religious law which condemns  
 “ a man to the bastinado for blasphemy, as was done  
 “ the other day, or to imprisonment for smoking a  
 “ cigarette during Ramazan, as was also done, will  
 “ eventually be adapted to the wants and usages of  
 “ modern society. All I know is that Blunt's friends  
 “ would do wisely not to raise the issue, for if the ques-  
 “ tion of conciliating the Sheriat and the Code Napo-  
 “ léon be seriously raised, the former will assuredly be  
 “ in the position of the earthen and the latter of the  
 “ iron pot of the fable. In the meantime it appears to  
 “ me that my wisest course, as representing the English  
 “ Government, is to sit still ; to dismiss Blunt's idle and  
 “ impractical dreams with the reflection that it is not  
 “ possible in Egypt, any more than elsewhere, to put  
 “ back the hands of the clock ; to show, on the other  
 “ hand, no undue and impolitic zeal for reform ; not to  
 “ raise burning questions to which, it may be, time

“ will find some solution, but only to deal with them  
“ when they are forced upon me.”<sup>1</sup>

There were only too often those who unwisely sought to force such questions upon him; and it required all his tact and skill to ward them off. Mukhtar Pasha, he told Sir H. Drummond Wolff in 1887, had impossible ideas on the subject of justice. “ His notion is to remodel the Mixed and Native Tribunals, as well as the Cadi’s Courts, on the basis of the Sheriat. He might as well try to restore the Heptarchy.”

But if Baring showed impatience at the sentimentality of visionaries like Blunt and at the crochets of philanthropists whose emotions outran their reason, he none the less attached the utmost importance to a governing race basing its relations with subject peoples on a rigid observance of the moral precepts of the Christian Code. That the sword should be kept bright he did not deny; but it should be kept for use only in grave emergencies. It was in the contentment of the subject race that a more worthy and a more lasting bond of union between the rulers and the ruled was to be found. Over and over again in his various writings we find stress laid upon the importance of recognition being accorded to this basic truth. “ If any more sweeping generalization than this is required, it may be said that the whole, or nearly the whole, of the essential points of a sound Imperial policy admit of being embodied in this one statement – that, whilst steadily avoiding any movement in the direction of official proselytism, our relations with the various races who are the subjects of the King of England should be founded on the granite rock of the Christian moral code.”<sup>2</sup>

And if the Christian Code was the foundation upon which an alien rule must rest, that rule must also, in the practical affairs of life, be guided by a wise expediency.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, dated May 1st, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> *The Government of Subject Races.*

Baring himself was never in doubt as to what was expedient in the case of a people occupying the position which the English people occupied in relation both to India and to Egypt. The whole of his experience, from the days when he had first served in India as private secretary to Lord Northbrook onwards, had confirmed him in the belief that low taxation must be given precedence over all other measures designed to benefit a subject people. And he had never departed from this view. The leading principle of a Government such as that of Great Britain in India, he wrote long afterwards, should be that "low taxation is the most potent instrument with which to conjure discontent. This is the policy which will tend more than any other to the stability of Imperial rule."<sup>1</sup>

This, therefore, was the policy which he set before himself, and to which he adhered with dogged patience and perseverance in his direction of the affairs of Egypt. And herein was to be found the secret of the vehemence with which he pressed his demands for financial relief upon successive Governments in London.

<sup>1</sup> *The Government of Subject Races.*

## CHAPTER XV

### TWO BLADES OF GRASS WHERE ONE—

THE race against bankruptcy had been a long and an uncertain one ; it was not finally won until the year 1888, when financial equilibrium was achieved and the prospect of a small surplus realized. How were any surpluses that might accrue to be employed ? With the emergence of this question into the realm of the practicable, a whole set of new problems rose above the horizon of the Egyptian financial ocean. There was not a department of the State which was not badly in need of funds for the remedy of crying evils and the inauguration of positive reforms. Demands for money spattered upon the Treasury like bullets from a maxim gun ; and it was clear that unless the question, how was the surplus to be employed, was approached with the utmost caution, there was every probability of the country sliding back into the Serbonian bog from which she had so recently emerged.

Baring's own answer to the question was never in doubt. Fiscal relief had a prior claim to administrative reform. " It was, therefore, decided that whilst penuriously doling out grants to the spending departments, the principal efforts of the Government should be devoted to devising means for the relief of taxation."<sup>1</sup> And it was with the utmost satisfaction that he recorded each step in this direction that it was found possible to take. A typical example may be taken from his Report on the Finances of Egypt written in March 1891, a year or two after the race against bankruptcy had been finally won :

" In spite of the extent to which the Egyptian Treasury  
" is crippled in the free disposal of the surplus which is

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 447.

“in reality available, it has been found possible to make provision in the Budget of 1891 for certain considerable measures of fiscal relief. The tax on sheep and goats which yielded £E.40,000 a year, and which weighed heavily on the agricultural population, has been abolished. So also has the octroi duty on oil and oil seeds, yielding £E.3,000 a year. . . . In all, taxation to the extent of £E.53,000 a year has been remitted.”

He did not, of course, dissent from the view that constructive reforms should be undertaken as funds became available, and the problem which he constantly pondered was how, without adding to the burdens on the Egyptian peasantry, could the resources of the Egyptian Treasury be augmented? There was one obvious way, as we have already seen, and in his pursuit of it he displayed in a remarkable degree the qualities which contributed so greatly to the successes of his public life – a capacity for taking a long view, patience, and pertinacity. The measure of the reward which the exercise of these qualities had already met with is to be found in the extent of the concessions which he had secured from the Government in England in connection with the cost of the occupation, referred to in Chapter XIII. For the time being he was satisfied with his achievement, and he waited for another six years before returning to the attack; and when he did so he prepared the ground with his usual care and foresight. The sum paid annually by Egypt in respect of the army of occupation had been reduced by the end of the 'eighties to £90,000. Early in 1893, a crisis precipitated by the headstrong action of Abbas II, who had succeeded Tewfik Pasha as Khedive, had necessitated an increase in the garrison and a proportionate rise in the subvention due from the Egyptian Treasury. The increase in the garrison was undoubtedly necessary; the rise in the subvention was as certainly annoying. Lord Rosebery was at the helm; and Lord Rosebery had proved himself a sympathetic chief. “The cold weather has



done harm to the crops," Baring mentioned, almost as an aside, in May of the year, "with the result that the financial people are rather saddened." It was not until five months later that he penned the corollary to this apparently innocent remark. He understood, he said, that the charge for the troops was likely to be in the neighbourhood of £125,000. When he received the detailed claim he would submit his observations on it. Meanwhile he wrote with the object of making "a somewhat audacious suggestion." Was a sum of £100,000 a year worth all the trouble and friction that it caused? They rather wanted something to put themselves well with public opinion in Egypt, and he knew of nothing so calculated to effect such an object as to abandon the claim for army expenses. Of course, he would obtain something in return. He would ask for the abolition of the salt tax and of the system under which payments were made in lieu of military service. "I rather tremble at the audacity of this proposal," he concluded, "but, if you could get it through, it would be a splendid stroke politically."<sup>1</sup> The reply was prompt and without a grain of comfort. "As to army of occupation expenses," Lord Rosebery wrote on the 27th of the month, "there is no chance of any generosity from the Exchequer this year. It is empty." Baring shrugged his shoulders and decided to wait. He waited for twelve months, and he then addressed the recently appointed Foreign Secretary, Lord Kimberley. "I am sending home an official request from Palmer<sup>2</sup> asking to be let off the army of occupation expenses. If the Treasury would relent, it would be a first-rate thing from the Egyptian point of view. If we are to stay here, we ought to try and make ourselves popular. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Lord Kimberley was no more encouraging than Lord Rosebery had been – Sir E. Palmer's proposal had been received with "much astonishment," he

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Rosebery, October 13th, 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Elwin Palmer had succeeded Sir E. Vincent as Financial Adviser.

<sup>3</sup> Letter dated October 20th, 1894.

wrote. It had always been maintained in Downing Street that the English were in Egypt, not for their own advantage, but for that of the Egyptians, and the natural consequence was that the Egyptian and not the British taxpayer should meet the cost. But might not the garrison now be reduced to the figure at which it had stood before the crisis of 1893? There were a number of excellent reasons why this should not be done; but of two evils a reduction of the garrison seemed to be the least, and on December the 24th Baring wrote: "It is rather an unfortunate moment for reducing the garrison; but it is quite out of the question that the Egyptian Treasury should be called upon to pay more money. They have not got it to pay." The garrison was accordingly reduced.

There was one constructive reform which Baring had realized at a very early date would be likely to prove remunerative, provided only that it could be proceeded with unhampered by the incubus of international control. If he were the Egyptian Finance Minister, he had written, he would borrow more money for canals before he thought of paying off a single penny of the Public Debt, and, writing to Mr. Goschen in February 1888, he had declared that if he had a free hand in Egypt, he would borrow from £200,000 to £300,000 a year for the next ten years to develop the country — "and I am quite confident," he concluded, "that such expenditure would greatly benefit the Treasury." He had, in fact, encouraged a forward policy in the matter of irrigation even during the days of acute financial stringency and alarming political uncertainty.

"Here," he told Lord Iddesleigh in October 1886, "we have interfered actively and with great success. It is the most important subject in the country, and, fortunately, it is a subject in respect to which the good results of European administration can be readily brought home to the natives. Hence there is some chance that, in the event of withdrawal, our work would not be wholly undone."

There was, in fact, no department of the State in which his fight against international control had met with a greater measure of success. From a comparatively early date the British engineers, headed by men with world-wide reputations – Sir Colin Scott-Moncrieff and later Sir William Garstin and Sir William Willcocks – were left free to design and execute their own plans for the canalization of the country. “They could decide on the construction of a canal without having to consider whether the policy of Great Britain in the Pacific or Indian Oceans was viewed with favour at Berlin or Paris.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, thanks to Baring’s foresight and insistence money had been provided – £1,000,000 of the loan raised as a result of the London Conference of 1884, and a further sum of £800,000 in 1890.

The money had not been secured without a struggle. “I remember some three years ago,” he reminded Mr. Goschen in 1888, “your Treasury authorities were much opposed to borrowing £1,000,000 for irrigation. The money is being admirably spent. There is no incident connected with Egyptian affairs which affords me greater pleasure than the successful fight I made to keep that £1,000,000 in the loan.” The results of this policy were soon apparent, and Egyptian public opinion was not slow to accord it its enthusiastic endorsement. Writing to Lord Salisbury in the autumn of 1889, Baring spoke with admiration of the work of the irrigation officers – “who are becoming daily more popular.” The works carried out were of a kind which affected every class of the population, and which admitted of being readily understood by all. They possessed an incidental advantage, for the constant presence in the provinces of a few cultivated Europeans well acquainted with the country and its language was of great general utility. They inspired confidence among the people, who spoke to them freely on matters in which they were interested, and their presence acted as a check to prevent any return to the

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 462.

abuses of the past. Yet, great though the value of a staff of European officers was, Baring appreciated fully the necessity of keeping their numbers down to the absolute minimum required. At a later date, when it became certain that the English would remain in Egypt for an indefinite period, Baring's policy changed somewhat in this respect. But in the earlier years of his Consul-Generalship he strove gallantly to restrict their numbers. "The question of the employment of Englishmen," he told Sir T. Sanderson in 1887, "is the great *cheval de bataille* of all our enemies, who make the most of it. But the whole case breaks down utterly under impartial examination."<sup>1</sup> And in 1891 he reported that not the least of the services rendered by Sir Colin Scott-Moncrieff and his assistants had been the gradual training of a capable staff of native engineers. "I should add," he wrote, "that the total number of Englishmen employed both in the superior and subordinate branches of the Irrigation Department is only seventeen."

It must not be imagined that his policy even in so obviously promising a field as that of irrigation was carried without a struggle. If the fight which he had fought with characteristic determination to secure for the Public Works Department the money which was required had not been won without a serious effort, neither had the battle which he had been obliged to fight to secure for them a free hand in the spending of it. The abolition of the *corvée* which was linked up with the work of the irrigation engineers provided an excuse for diplomatic interference. As a condition of his consent, the French Consul-General demanded that the expenditure of the Public Works Department should be placed under the control of the *Caisse*. In London, where anxiety was keen to buy off the opposition of France to a reform to which the greatest importance was attached in England, a certain readiness to agree to this condition manifested itself. From such a course Baring, as we shall see,

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated March 17th, 1887.

vigorously dissented.<sup>1</sup> And once again time bore witness to the wisdom and foresight of the English Consul-General. But the controversy over the *corvée* gave rise to other complications. In a fit of exasperation at the apparent failure of English diplomacy to carry the abolition of the *corvée* against the opposition of the French, Sir Colin Scott-Moncrieff tendered his resignation, Baring's letter in reply is typical alike of his composure in the face of crises and of his capacity for handling men –

"I received your letter with great regret. Your  
"resignation, particularly at this moment, will, of  
"course, materially increase the difficulties of the  
"situation, which are already sufficiently great. It  
"appears to me that your duty is to remain at your  
"post, but, of course, that is a matter of which you are  
"the sole judge.

"You speak, in your letter, of Lord Salisbury having  
"‘re-imposed’ the *corvée*. I must entirely disclaim,  
"on behalf of Lord Salisbury and the English Govern-  
"ment, any responsibility for its re-imposition. The  
"French Government is responsible for this measure.  
"The Egyptian Government has, with my concurrence,  
"decided to call out the *corvée* in order not to drift into  
"an illegal position which would place them entirely  
"at the mercy of the French and other Governments.  
"No one can regret more than I do that in this and  
"other matters the English and Egyptian Govern-  
"ments have not greater liberty of action. But when  
"I accepted my present office I knew that the real  
"difficulties of the situation consisted in the fact that  
"we were not masters in Egypt to do what we liked,  
"but were bound by various legal and international  
"fetters. I presume that you must have known the  
"same.

"So far as I am concerned, the fact that a serious diffi-  
"culty has arisen will make me all the more determined  
"to stick to my work and to assist, to the best of my  
"ability, in the very difficult task which the British and  
"Egyptian Governments have undertaken in Egypt.  
"I shall communicate nothing on this subject home  
"until I hear from you again, as it is possible that you

<sup>1</sup> See forward, Chapter XVI., pp. 187 *et seq.*

“ may have acted under a momentary impulse, and  
 “ that you may wish to cancel a step which – though  
 “ possibly applauded by some – will, I think, be con-  
 “ demned by the more thoughtful amongst your  
 “ friends.”<sup>1</sup>

He reported the matter to Lord Salisbury. He had had “ rather a stormy week,” he said. “ Fired, possibly, by the example of your late Chancellor of the Exchequer,\* Moncrieff has sent in his resignation.” He thought that in episodes of this kind Lord Salisbury might possibly be able to help him. “ It would strengthen my hands, I think, if you could find time to write me a private letter which, should occasion arise, I could show to Moncrieff or any other recalcitrant Briton. The English officials here are doing admirable work. They are in very difficult positions, and great allowances should be made for them. At the same time they are occasionally very troublesome. . . .” On this occasion the trouble was surmounted and the resignation withdrawn.

An important question of policy had had to be decided at the very beginning of Baring’s term of office as Consul-General. The great barrage which had been constructed at the apex of the Egyptian Delta at a cost of £2,000,000 had cracked very soon after its completion, and when Baring reached Egypt in 1883 had been practically useless for the past fifteen years. In place of it the Egyptian Government had embarked upon an elaborate and an extremely costly and inefficient system of pumping. This policy was reversed, and, during the first six or seven years of Baring’s control of the affairs of Egypt, a sum of £460,000 was spent in restoring the long-neglected barrage. “ The best work we have done in Egypt,” Baring told Sir T. Sanderson in 1887, “ has been in connection with irrigation, and in this connection the strengthening of the barrage is by far the most important part of the work.”

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 6th, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Randolph Churchill.

The value of the work resulted from the fact that so long as there was water in the Nile the barrage enabled it to be controlled, so that however low the river might fall, the water was carried to the fields and the cotton crop secured. "I have already mentioned," Baring wrote in a Report in 1891, "that the value of the cotton crop has increased on an average by £835,000 a year." But the great barrage was not the only work required to prevent the loss of revenue for which neglect of the irrigation system of Upper Egypt had been responsible. In exceptional years the loss had been disastrous. After a deficient flood in 1877, the loss to the revenue had been estimated to be not less than £1,112,000; and in 1888 Baring himself had seen a loss of £300,000 from the same cause. And it was as always, of the avoidable suffering of the people that he thought. "If such was the loss of revenue alone," he wrote, "it may be imagined what a heavy calamity was inflicted on the cultivators."<sup>1</sup>

That the loss was avoidable he was assured by the English engineers. Colonel Ross amongst others had proved that by a judicious system of canals, sluices, syphons, escapes, weirs, and other such devices it could be arranged that even in the worst years the whole Nile valley should receive its share of silt-laden water. Arrangements for the construction of the various devices at a cost of £600,000 were consequently sanctioned. And Baring saw to it that when the water was made available it should be fairly distributed. "In former times," he wrote, "very great abuses occurred in connection with this subject. The water is now distributed on just and scientific principles."

A time came when a further question of first-rate importance arose for decision. The restoration of the great barrage had placed at the disposal of the Irrigation Department all the water of the low Nile; but under the reign of law and of peace which had set in with the British occupation, the increase in the area requiring

<sup>1</sup> Egypt, No. 3 of 1891.

irrigation was outrunning the increase in the water available, and it became necessary, therefore, to find some means of storing the surplus volume of water brought down in the flood season for use when the river became low. Of two major projects which were seriously considered, that which involved the creation of a vast lake above Aswan by means of a huge dam was eventually decided on. And, before Baring finally severed his connection with Egypt in 1907, he was able to give Sir Edward Grey some account of the benefits which had been conferred upon the country by this great undertaking, and to submit to him a proposal, worked out under the direction of Sir William Garstin, for a heightening of the dam by twenty-three feet at a cost of £E.1,500,000, whereby the supply of water would be more than doubled.

In allotting the gain from the construction of the Aswan dam the policy steadfastly pursued by Baring had again been followed; matters had been so arranged that the direct benefit might be reaped by the people rather than by the Treasury. "The reason why the actual return to the Treasury has been small," he explained, "is that it was thought best to impose a very light land tax on the lands affected, and thus leave the benefits to be derived from the reservoir to fructify in the pockets of the population."<sup>1</sup> And how remarkable these benefits had been! It was estimated by Sir William Garstin that the value of the lands provided with perennial irrigation had been increased by no less than £E.24,510,000, and that this figure would in a very short time be swollen to £E.28,300,000. The increased rental value of the same lands was by 1907 £E.1,465,000, while the cotton crop, hitherto dependent on a fluctuating supply of water, was now permanently secured. The value of the crop in 1906 was estimated to be no less than £E.28,000,000. These were results which had actually accrued; and it must have been a matter of

<sup>1</sup> Despatch dated March 15th, 1907.



intense satisfaction to Lord Cromer that one of the last despatches which he penned in Egypt, should have been one containing his recommendation that a scheme should be proceeded with by which the volume of water stored by the Aswan dam would be raised from 980,000,000 cubic metres, at which it then stood, to approximately 2,200,000,000 cubic metres, which was the amount which it was estimated would be available, after allowing for loss by evaporation, for distribution.

It is not, perhaps, strictly relevant to my theme, but it is at least an interesting coincidence, and one which must be a matter of legitimate pride to all Englishmen, that two of the great proconsuls of their race who were bearing the white man's burden in different parts of the world should have been devoting their energies simultaneously to making the deserts of Africa and of Asia blossom like the rose. While Lord Cromer was pressing forward the schemes outlined above in Egypt, Lord Curzon in India was giving his mind to the recommendations put before him by the same adviser who had assisted Cromer during his earlier years in Egypt; and was finding the pages of the Report issued by the Irrigation Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Colin Scott-Moncrieff, as he has himself told us, "infinitely more interesting than a novel." And if in India the works which have been constructed as a result of the schemes planned and inaugurated in the days of Lord Curzon's spectacular Viceroyalty surpass in magnitude even those carried out in Egypt, it is because the players in the wonderful drama of reclamation in that country found themselves in possession of a vaster theatre in which to stage their magic transformation scenes. In Egypt as in India these great works will provide a remarkable and an abiding monument to the beneficence of British rule.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A COMMANDING FIGURE

WE have now seen something of the fruits of Baring's statesmanship in his conduct of affairs during those critical years in which the Egypt that was to be, was slowly and painfully coming to birth. The ten years 1888 to 1898 which we have now reached may perhaps be regarded as the apex of his career. In the closing year of the decade he was smitten with one of those calamities which wring the heart and bow, if they do not break, the spirit; blows which stun the mind and numb the hopes men set their hearts upon, lacerating the tenderest feelings of the spirit and filling the future with the chill emptiness of despair. For in the year 1898 Lady Cromer died. Let us then pause for a little in the narrative that we may look rather closer at the man himself as he appeared in the fullness of life and in the heyday of a great career.

If the year 1887 was a turning-point in the history of England in Egypt, as Baring himself always maintained that it was, it also constituted a landmark in his own career in that country. The failure of the Wolff Convention removed the main cause of uncertainty with regard to the future. "The Wolff negotiations had one great advantage," Baring wrote some time afterwards, "that they gave us a fair case for declining to negotiate again—for the time being at all events." And the improvement in the finances of the country made the beginning of a policy of benevolence towards the peasantry possible.

The effect of these altered circumstances upon Baring's own position is noticeable. From now onwards every year added to the impressiveness of the spectacle which

he presented and to the strength of his grip upon the country. He grew in stature until he seemed to dominate the valley of the Nile, a forceful figure of whom the words –

*He doth bestride the narrow world like a Colossus –*

might appropriately have been written. He took on something of the essential immutability of the Pyramids. One could almost imagine the Sphinx, her age-long gaze across the centuries deflected momentarily by so arresting a display of concentration and purpose, smiling in recognition of qualities rivalling her own. Emerson found the Englishman to be him of all men who stood firmest in his shoes, having in himself what he valued in his horses – mettle and bottom. “He has stamina,” he added, “he can take the initiative in emergencies. He has that *aplomb* which results from a good adjustment of the moral and physical nature and the obedience of all the powers to the will. . . .” Could he have visited Egypt in these days, he would have recognized in Evelyn Baring the very prototype of the race whose characteristics it delighted him to portray.

His moral ascendancy was reinforced by his physical appearance. Tall beyond the average, broad-shouldered, burly from tip to toe, clear-eyed, fresh-complexioned, with features carved seemingly with a broad-edged chisel out of matter of granitic strength, he moved solidly and imperturbably about his world. “Every one of these islanders,” wrote Emerson of the English, “is an island himself, safe, tranquil, incommunicable.” Such was Baring.

With the particular moral, mental, and physical equipment with which Nature had thus endowed him, it was little surprising that he should be affected by the peculiar conditions of the post which he occupied – that rein should be given “to the autocratic character to which he was temperamentally predisposed.” In India

<sup>1</sup> *Social and Diplomatic Memories*, by Sir James Rennell Rodd.

he had been known as "the Vice-Viceroy"; in Egypt he was christened "Over-Baring"; and later, after his elevation to the peerage, "The Lord." The use of the latter sobriquet was not confined to the English population; to the Egyptians, down to the very donkey-boys in the streets of Cairo, he was equally "El Lord." In his later years in Egypt he formed the habit of taking long walks accompanied by his Oriental secretary and trusted friend, Mr. Harry Boyle, in the course of which – a modern Haroun al Rashid – he mixed with and talked to the humbler dwellers in the Nile valley. Hence the nickname, Enoch, by which Harry Boyle came to be known, for, like his prototype before him, "he walked daily with the Lord."

There was at this time ample justification for Lord Rosebery's terse and witty reference to Egypt as "the running sore," for it was in Egypt that England was most painfully vulnerable when, for one cause or another, she excited the hostility of one or other of the European Powers. But there was even greater justification for the habit which the inmates of the Foreign Office insensibly fell into of talking of "the Satrapy of Egypt." Neither was this view of the dominant position which Evelyn Baring had established for himself confined to people of his own race. "Il passe à Londres," wrote a French critic, "pour avoir seul conquis et conservé l'Egypte. Aussi est-il le seul arbitre de toutes les décisions à prendre dans les affaires qui la concernent."<sup>1</sup>

A factor favourable to the development of the imperious tendencies of a dominating personality was the instability of Governments in England. Foreign Secretaries passed in rapid succession across the scene. Lord Salisbury succeeded Lord Granville; Lord Rosebery, Lord Salisbury. For a brief space, towards the end of the year 1886, Lord Iddesleigh became responsible for the relations of Great Britain with her neighbours, only to make

<sup>1</sup> From a character-sketch by L. I. Picard in a French newspaper.

room, after a few short months, for Lord Salisbury once more, with his remarkable capacity for grasping the main features of any particular political situation but with his equally striking indisposition to grapple with detail. During the Liberal Administration of 1892-5 Lord Rosebery again took the helm, but handed it to Lord Kimberley on his own succession to the Premiership in the spring of 1894. While Time was thus engaged in turning the political kaleidoscope on the banks of the Thames, Baring remained in unchallenged ascendancy on the banks of the Nile ; and it would have been strange indeed, if, when placing before each new incumbent of the Foreign Office as he appeared the views which he had formed as a result of his own comprehensive experience of the country, he had not done so with a steadily growing emphasis.

The anomalies of the system of Government which had emerged out of the unprecedented position which had been thrust upon Great Britain in Egypt, not as a result of any definite policy, but by the mere unplanned and unforeseen succession of events – a system which Baring himself often described as “one of the most complicated and cumbersome administrative machines ever devised by the mind of man” – likewise tended to foster a spirit of assertiveness ; for the anomalies were such that it was easy to see that unless someone of unusual strength of mind, self-reliance, and initiative took control, the delicately adjusted parts of the mechanism would fly asunder and the whole machine be brought to ruin. “I find the executive and legislative power so disseminated,” Baring told Lord Salisbury, “as to make it well-nigh impossible to say where either power resides.” And to the uncertainty as to the seat of executive and legislative authority was added a further element of perplexity due to the always incalculable attitude of the Khedive. For Tewfik Pasha, Baring entertained kindly feelings. In his public career he showed himself the possessor of an appreciable measure of common sense ;

and, in spite of the modest level of his intellectual attainments, he proved himself, in comparison with his infamous predecessor, a satisfactory ruler. He was neither a murderer, a spendthrift, nor a thief – negative qualities which, judged by the moral standards of the society in which he lived, might be said to rise to the level of positive virtues. But it was seldom possible to foretell how, in any particular circumstances, he might be expected to act. “He will err more by sins of omission than of commission,” Baring explained to Lord Salisbury in the early summer of 1887. “I do not fear his adopting a mistaken policy so much as I fear his adopting no policy at all. If anyone were to tell him that it is dangerous to play with lucifer matches in a powder magazine he would fully agree, and if anyone were handy to prevent him he would probably not play with them ; but, if not, he is just as likely as not to strike just one match in order to see the effect, and then be greatly surprised that an explosion takes place. There never was a man who acted more frequently on the *video meliora*, etc., principle. The only remedy for this is constant watchfulness.”

And if the difficulty of Baring’s position vis-a-vis the Egyptian authorities was great, the delicacy of the situation where the European Powers were concerned was greater still. “I can scarcely move a step without producing a jar of conflicting international interests.” Moreover, he found that a number of checks which had been devised in the first instance to prevent a bad Government from moving in a vicious direction were, under the influence of international jealousy, being employed to prevent a reforming Government from embarking upon a salutary and perfectly legitimate course.<sup>1</sup> To Baring, bent upon reform, this last feature of the system was the most galling of all.

There was no law, custom, or decree, authorizing the English Consul-General to take control ; in theory his powers and position were those of the Consuls-General

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, January 2nd, 1891.

of the other interested Powers, and a lesser man might well have shirked the task. There were, indeed, occasions on which even Baring protested against the extent of the responsibility which it was sought to thrust upon him. "If I am to be responsible for everything that occurs," he told Lord Salisbury, "I must have more power and a more clearly defined position. . . ." Everyone who was interested in Egypt, from the politician and the philanthropist to the trader, the antiquarian, and the scientist, assumed, when it suited his purpose, that Egypt was a Dependency of Great Britain, and that the British representative had only to issue orders to be immediately obeyed. "I have a lively recollection," Baring wrote, early in 1891, "of Dr. S——, of botanical fame, raving against the abandonment of the Sudan on the peculiar ground that a special class of trefoil was found in the Bahr-el-Ghazal Province and nowhere else." Other scientific specialists appeared equally blind to political realities. There were Egyptologists who talked and acted as if a war with France was a matter of slight importance as compared with "the preservation of the cartouche of some deceased Pharaoh."

It was this aspect of the case — the fact that the British Government had intervened in the internal affairs of Egypt with the sole object of restoring order and re-establishing the legitimate authority of the Khedive and his Government ; that the occupation was a friendly one, undertaken by mutual consent of the parties concerned and not as in any respect reducing the country to the position of a conquered State — that Baring consistently impressed upon the English officials in the service of the Egyptian Government. In an earlier chapter stress has been laid upon the fact that these persons were not under the Consul-General's orders ; and the extent to which they relied upon Baring's support, and were guided by his advice, constitutes striking testimony to the dominance of the position to which he had attained. "Probably no administrator of modern times was ever so often referred

to, to settle multifarious questions great and small"; and the author of these words attributed the fact largely to the English Consul-General's accessibility. Outside the circle of those who knew him personally Baring had a reputation for brusqueness. The reputation was ill-deserved, in that it created a false impression of rudeness. In manner he could sometimes be abrupt, in conversation blunt. "Well," he would say, leaning slightly forward with his hands on the arms of his chair, as if about to rise, when he thought that it was time that an interview was brought to an end, "is there anything else?" The habit was no doubt disconcerting to the timid, and was probably irritating to others; but behind manner and words alike there lurked a genuine geniality. With Egyptians, whose Oriental modes of approaching a subject he thoroughly understood, he would show infinite patience, suffering with complete outward composure the inroads upon his sorely needed time by the redundances and the irrelevancies, the pauses and the hesitations, the wide circumnavigation of the real subject eventually to be broached, unavoidable if anything of value was to be obtained from an interview with anyone of Eastern birth and upbringing.

And if it be said that he was devoid of social graces, the expression must be understood in the sense that he disliked artificiality of any kind and not that his conversation was lacking in polish; on the contrary, his conversation, like his writings, was often scholarly and adorned with apt quotation, the fruit of his own wide reading. It has been said of him that he "endured rather than enjoyed his obligations to the visitors for whom the great proconsul was one of the *mirabilia* of their winter experience."<sup>1</sup> The reason was, in the main, the encroachments which they made upon the time already too short for all the work that had to be fitted into it. His brusqueness was due in part to the same cause and in part to a

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Dean Butcher, April 11th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup> Sir J. Rennell Rodd in *Social and Diplomatic Memories*.



natural frankness and dislike of circumlocution. He attached far more importance to the substance than to the form of words, rejecting utterly the view that statesmanship is synonymous with fine writing or perfervid oratory. He held that the main object of a writer, still more of an orator, should be to state his facts and prove his case, thus agreeing with Quintilian that "no speaker, when important interests are involved, should be very solicitous about his words."<sup>1</sup>

He had the hatred of Emerson's typical Englishman for "the practical cowards who could not in affairs answer directly yes or no." He was never, as he himself confessed, "much of a courtier"; and, when strongly moved, expletives came instinctively to his lips. "D——n it, he's dead!" was the exclamation that escaped from him on opening a telegram that conveyed news of Gerald Portal's death. On another occasion, when listening to a translation of his own words of displeasure addressed to a Pasha who had been guilty of speculation, dissatisfied with the unduly tactful paraphrases of his Oriental secretary who was playing the part of interpreter, and determined to make the cause of his displeasure unmistakably clear, he broke in in Turkish, of which he had a fair knowledge himself, "You are a robber!" It is said of his grandson, who was required to sit for his portrait at a very youthful age, that in the course of the third sitting he got up and, exclaiming, "This man bores me!" left the room. The story might have been told of the great proconsul himself.

There was, undoubtedly, what Sir Rennell Rodd has described as "a redoubtable element" in Baring, even such men as Kitchener and Sir Leslie Rundle admitting that they always approached the door of his study with a sense of shyness and misgiving.<sup>2</sup> He certainly could be very frank in his dealings with the English officials in the employ of the Egyptian Government. If he differed

<sup>1</sup> *Translation and Paraphrase*, first published in the *Edinburgh Review*, July 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Social and Diplomatic Memories*, Second Series, p. 5.

with them, he did so without malice ; but he did not hesitate to tell them so. The question of the abolition of the *corvée* was, as has been explained in an earlier chapter, a burning one with Evelyn Baring. The question was under the consideration of Her Majesty's Government in consultation with Mr. Vincent – now Lord D'Abernon, to whom a heavy debt of gratitude is due for services rendered to the Empire in many a difficult field – who had proceeded from Cairo to London in the early summer of 1887 to represent the Government of the Khedive. An Agreement, of which Baring disapproved, was reached, and in a reply to a letter from Mr. Vincent he set forth his opinion :

“ You say that your action about the *corvée* business in London is consistent with the attitude you assumed here. I find it difficult to reconcile the two ; but the point is unimportant. You may be consistent, or, if inconsistent (surely the most pardonable of political offences), you may be right. So I will say nothing more on that subject.”

He explained that he had not the least objection to assisting in getting the arrangement put through, if the British Government desired it :

“ I am much too old an official hack to mind in the very least my opinion being set aside. I shall carry out faithfully whatever instructions I receive. But do not ask me to say that I approve of the arrangement ; that I am unable to do. I think it a bad one, and I further think that the mere fact of its being put forward has weakened our diplomatic position at a rather critical moment.”

His objections to the proposed arrangement were two-fold. He thought it unnecessarily complicated :

“ We have already suffered from the complications of the London Convention. That Convention was the work of a number of doctrinaires who had not to work in practice the machine they had themselves forged. I regard it as a standing monument of

"financial pedantry. Let us above all things simplify the machinery. The Decree does just the reverse."

His other objection was that it gave the *Caisse* too great a measure of control :

"If you (and Palmer) wish to have further letters forged for you, I can, of course, have nothing more to say. I cannot be more royalist than the king. But I think that you are making a mistake and that you will repent it."

He did not deny that there was force in the desire felt in London to secure a settlement to which the French were ready to agree. But he thought that undue weight was being attached to this aspect of the case. They had yielded to the French the point which the latter had always contended was an essential preliminary to insuring their co-operation in the reform of Egypt's institutions. They had fixed a date for the evacuation.<sup>1</sup> And in these circumstances it was the French, surely, who might be expected to make concessions to Great Britain, and not the British to France. He had sounded the French representative on the spot :

"I explained my programme to d'Aunay the other day, and he was not at all startled by it. It is : let the *Caisse* keep the money for the coupons, hand over the balance to the Egyptian Government, give the *Caisse* (if needs be) a *very* limited and well-defined power of post-audit, and let the real financial control be exercised by the English Financial Adviser, whose position should be strengthened. Surely this is a better and more workable programme than continuing on the faulty lines of the London Convention with a fresh apparatus reproducing (as it seems to me) its faults in an aggravated form."

It might be thought that he was stubborn in thus pressing his view. If he was, it seemed to him that he at least had good reason for being so. The London Convention had placed a limit upon administrative expenditure – a step

<sup>1</sup> The Wolff Convention had just been signed.

which had been taken in face of the strongest protests by himself ; and the result had been what he had predicted :

“ In the course of an official experience which now  
“ extends over many years, I do not think that any-  
“ thing has happened which has sunk so much into my  
“ mind as the treatment a few months ago of the  
“ *corvée* plus military expenditure question. The les-  
“ son derived from it is this – that as a very large part  
“ of the responsibility of meeting any difficulties that  
“ may arise will fall on me, I shall take very great care  
“ not to say I approve of any plan unless I really think  
“ that there is a fair chance of carrying it out in prac-  
“ tice. Mr. Squeers’s method of learning botany is very  
“ applicable to politics. He spelt the word first in  
“ the schoolroom and then sent the boys to weed the  
“ garden. You and I have to weed the garden. The  
“ Treasury officials only have to do the spelling, which  
“ is a very different thing. . . . Certainly the Treasury  
“ officials should be heard, but in matters of this sort  
“ local opinion should obtain an even more attentive  
“ hearing.”<sup>1</sup>

He suffered neither fools nor folly gladly ; and, when he was satisfied that a rebuke was called for, he did not hesitate to administer it. No one who laid himself open to reproof at the hands of the English Consul-General ever had cause to complain of any lack of courtesy in the form in which it was conveyed ; neither, be it added, had he any excuse for misunderstanding the purport of the communication which he received. An English official of the Egyptian Home Department, concerned with the administration of the gaols, raised difficulties when prison labour was required for the construction of the Sudan railway. Baring disposed of the matter in a few terse sentences :

“ You tell me that next year you intend ‘ to refuse to  
“ ‘give the men.’ That will depend on the orders you  
“ receive from your official superiors. It is highly im-  
“ probable that you will be allowed to act as you pro-  
“ pose. In the meantime I request that you will do  
“ all in your power to assist the Sirdar.”

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. Vincent, May 29th, 1887.

He was equally firm in explaining his views to a gentleman whose wife took a laudable interest in her husband's prospects. His letter was addressed to his correspondent's husband :

" I have received a letter from Mrs. ——— touching on a  
 " number of questions which are, in a great degree, of  
 " an official nature. If at any time you have anything  
 " to say to me on matters connected with your position,  
 " or with business generally, I shall be very happy to  
 " listen to you ; but I must decline to enter into any  
 " discussion on such matters with Mrs. ———. I shall  
 " feel obliged to you if you will explain this to Mrs.  
 " ———."

The lady was pertinacious, but not more so than the Consul-General :

" This is the second letter I have received within the  
 " last few days from Mrs. ——— on the subject of your  
 " advancement. I shall always be most happy to listen  
 " to anything you may have to say yourself ; but I  
 " must beg to be excused from corresponding with  
 " Mrs. ——— on the subject."

Evelyn Baring was, in fact, particularly impervious to feminine blandishments ; those who were ill-advised enough to cast the seed of their allurements before him, found that it had fallen upon stony ground indeed. That is not to say that he was either staid or prudish. His attitude towards women was the natural corollary of his views, not merely on the sanctity, but on the essential importance, of marriage. High in the category of human characteristics he placed all those qualities comprised in the expressive Greek term *αἰδώς*—poorly translated by the English word " self-respect " ; and those qualities, in his view, were dependent upon a rigid adherence to the institution of monogamy.<sup>1</sup> In literature of the lighter kind the ordinary love-story made no appeal to him ; on the other hand, studies of character aroused his keenest interest. He had a lively sense of humour, and at times

<sup>1</sup> See *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 542.

displayed a boyish enjoyment of fun. On the inauguration of a ladies' club in Cairo he made a presentation of a pincushion and powder-box as a mark of his encouragement and support.<sup>1</sup> To a friend he once wrote, "My Scotch keeper writes: 'I hope Miss —— will get a good husband. There is lots of rabbits this year.' The two subjects seem disconnected, like George IV being a 'bald but obstinate monarch.' " Under his lead the whole staff at the Agency was permeated with an irrepressible *joie de vivre*. Knowledge that, however exacting, the task was so well worth the doing; that the chief whom they served was both essentially great and essentially human, bound them with the bonds of an invigorating *esprit de corps* and induced, even in the discharge of the routine of official duty, an extraordinary sense of exhilaration.

While Baring shunned notoriety, he appreciated the importance of focusing the attention of the Egyptian public upon the reality of British power. He drove through the streets of Cairo, an imposing and remarked-on figure, preceded, in accordance with the custom of those days, by running *syces* with white wands and flying sleeves. He played tennis, when time allowed, for exercise and recreation; during the periodic crises through which the affairs of Egypt passed he made time for a leisurely set – not for recreation, but for the purpose of demonstrating his unconcern. His *aplomb* was, in fact, not the least disconcerting of his characteristics in the eyes of his foreign colleagues. "During the worst of the crisis," he wrote in February 1893, "I played lawn tennis every day. It gave confidence to the English and annoyed the French and others extremely – in fact I did it partly on purpose to annoy them."<sup>2</sup> Had not Emerson, perhaps, reason on his side when he said that English nature was so rank and aggressive as to be a little incompatible with every other?

<sup>1</sup> *Social and Diplomatic Memories*, Sir J. Rennell Rodd,

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Rosebery.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE CRISIS OF JANUARY 1893

IN one of the oft-recurring cycles of Egyptian history there had arisen a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph. In the year 1892 this episode repeated itself. On January the 7th the Khedive Tewfik died, and Abbas II reigned in his stead. During twelve years of chequered history Tewfik Pasha had, with considerable success, screened from the public gaze the actual mechanism by which the government of the country had been kept in motion. He had cheerfully filled the rôle, not wholly uncongenial to an Eastern ruler of lethargic temperament, of "sitting on a rail and never going very far in the direction of supporting any one order of ideas." He had, in fact, provided the Egyptian ship of state with exactly the kind of figurehead which the circumstances of the time demanded. "Under Tewfik," Baring told Lord Rosebery, "I remained more or less hidden. I pulled the strings. . . . It was an artificial and unsatisfactory system. Its only merit was that it worked fairly well and produced good results; moreover, it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to devise any other system."<sup>1</sup> How would the system work with another, and for the present unknown, personality in the prow?

Baring's earliest impression of the new ruler of Egypt was not unpleasing. He had the appearance of a very gentlemanlike and healthily minded public school boy, intelligent but a good deal bored with El Azhar Sheikhs, Ramazan fasts, and all the other ordinances, inhibitions, and taboos of religious orthodoxy. On the whole, Baring could have wished that the new Viceroy had been a little less civilized. He was rather doubtful if he could make of him a good Muslim.

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated January 22nd, 1893.

Events immediately following upon the death of Tewfik Pasha tended, indeed, to throw the new Khedive into the arms of England ; for the Sultan seized the occasion provided by the necessary issue of a firman appointing Abbas to be Khedive to alter the boundaries of Egypt by excluding from it the Sinai Peninsula. The attempt was frustrated by the refusal of the British Government to allow the promulgation of the firman until this provision had been excised from it.

The Sultan attempted further interference in the affairs of Egypt through the agency of Mukhtar Pasha, the Turkish Commissioner in Cairo, who pressed upon the young Khedive a suggestion that he should change his Ministers, the object of this manœuvre, which had the active support of the French and Russian Consuls-General, being to supplant Mustapha Pasha Fehmi, the Prime Minister, by a Minister less well disposed towards Great Britain. The situation arising from these various intrigues was described by Baring in a letter to Lord Salisbury on April the 15th :

“ The position here during the last week or two has  
 “ been rather delicate. First, my poor little Khedive  
 “ was bandied about like a shuttlecock between rival  
 “ interests ; but he behaved very well. Then, we have  
 “ a very honest and well-intentioned, but extremely  
 “ weak, Prime Minister. Both he and the Khedive  
 “ cling to my skirts with a tenacity which is almost  
 “ greater than I could wish. Then there is Tigrane, the  
 “ only intelligent man in the Cabinet, hating the Prime  
 “ Minister, perhaps casting an eye on his place, not  
 “ exactly Gallophile, but certainly somewhat Anglo-  
 “ phobe, and, after the manner of the Byzantine mind,  
 “ splitting straws on fine points in a time of crisis. In  
 “ the midst of all the bother with the Sultan and  
 “ Mukhtar, I narrowly escaped a disruption of the  
 “ Ministry from internal dissension.”

From these excursions and alarms one thing emerged of greater significance than seems to have been appreciated at the time – the young Khedive displayed a very marked

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disinclination to "sit on a rail," refraining from "going very far in the direction of supporting any one order of ideas." He lost no time, indeed, in showing that he was prepared to go a very long way in pursuit of one very definite idea born of the interference of the Turk, and that was to resist all encroachments from that direction upon what he regarded as his own prerogatives. He even contemplated dismissing his Turkish bodyguard as an outward and visible sign of his annoyance with his Suzerain. "I see that the young Khedive is going to be very Egyptian," Baring wrote, soon after his accession, "by which I mean not so much anti-European – and certainly not anti-English – as anti-Turk, anti-Syrian, etc. His anti-Turk proclivities having been a good deal developed by Mukhtar's injudicious treatment, I endeavour to tone down any too ardent patriotism."<sup>1</sup>

With a commendable display of spirit – which contained nevertheless a warning of possible trouble in the future – Abbas II summoned the Turkish Commissioner and his Ministers to an audience, and in the presence of, and for the special benefit of, the former, expressed his full confidence in his Ministry. From Baring's point of view this display of spirit was all to the good. In Constantinople, needless to say, it was attributed to the machinations of the English Consul-General, and the Sultan "revenged himself on England by conferring some trumpery grades and decorations on a number of Anglophobe newspaper editors and others."<sup>2</sup>

While the Sultan was occupying himself in this way, Lord Salisbury was considering how best he could recognize the exceptional services which Baring had rendered to Great Britain. "We all of us feel," he wrote on March 12th, "that not only we, but the country, owes you a very great debt of gratitude for the work you have done in Egypt – an undertaking which has required very exceptional qualities and the result of which has exceeded

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, February 21st, 1892.

<sup>2</sup> *Abbas II*, by the Earl of Cromer.

all expectations." It would, however, Lord Salisbury thought, be "rather absurd" that the recognition which they desired to make should take the form of promotion which would destroy in a great measure his opportunity of rendering the special service for which he was uniquely qualified in the future. The Queen, he had reason to know, would be very willing to confer a Peerage upon him, if that were agreeable to his own wishes. Evelyn Baring accordingly now became a member of the Upper House, with the title of Baron Cromer.

In July he took leave with an easy mind, and repaired to Strathmore Lodge, in Caithness-shire, where, in company with his family and his brother Tom Baring, he was wont to seek a well-earned spell of change and recreation in a renewal of the pursuits which as boys little Evelyn and his brother had enjoyed in the bluff company of the Norfolk keepers. Not, if he could help it, would he forgo this annual break with the hot and dusty climate and the grinding routine of his life and work in Egypt. "Your victory instils a faint hope into my mind," he once wrote to Sir H. Kitchener, when the affairs of the Sudan were once more obtruding themselves upon the attention of the authorities in Egypt, "that I may, after all, get a mouthful of Scotch air this year. I should like to do so both because I want to see my eldest boy, whom I have not seen for a year, and because I am not as young as I was. . . ." Not for a moment would he think of leaving if Kitchener thought it desirable that he should stay; but, a decision to advance having been taken, there seemed little that he could do while the actual operations were in progress - "I cannot fire off Krupp guns or spear Wad Bishara with my own hands, so that in the interval I don't see that I am much good, and whilst you are shooting Dervishes I may as well be shooting grouse."<sup>1</sup>

On Baring's return to Cairo in the autumn of 1892, the atmosphere was less calm than it had been before his departure. The new Khedive had been showing towards

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated June 18th, 1896.

the English officials something of the spirit of mutinousness which had so annoyed the Sultan earlier in the year. Changes, too, had taken place in England. Time had given another twist to the political kaleidoscope, and Mr. Gladstone had returned to enjoy an Indian summer of power in Downing Street. Whoever else may have welcomed such a change, Cromer most assuredly did not. During the preceding autumn Mr. Gladstone and other leading figures in the Liberal Party had indulged in an oratorical campaign. Their speeches had attracted a great deal of attention in the towns in Egypt, and had given rise to fresh rumours of an intention on the part of the English to leave the country. One speech by Mr. Gladstone in particular had had a striking and significant effect – one hundred and twenty subscribers to a leading Egyptian newspaper which supported English policy in Egypt had stopped their subscriptions. “All the talk about evacuation has unsettled people’s minds,” Cromer wrote in December 1891. The agitation to which Mr. Gladstone’s speeches had given rise was, fortunately, to a large extent fictitious. “There is no real discontent on which to work,” Cromer stated; “far from it. The population generally were never happier. . . .” Nevertheless, it was obvious that if, now that he was in office, Mr. Gladstone gave effect to the policy which he had been preaching while in Opposition, there was going to be trouble in Egypt. It was with the utmost satisfaction, therefore, that Cromer hailed the return of Lord Rosebery to the Foreign Office. He, at least, was in the habit of facing realities, and Cromer hastened to apprise him of the facts of the situation – “I am sending you a short despatch about the Khedive. He has been very foolish about a number of small things, but he is so young and inexperienced that he ought not to be judged too harshly. I lectured him in plain but very friendly terms, and I do not anticipate that for the time being I shall have much difficulty with him.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated November 12th, 1892.

This last expectation soon proved to be of far too sanguine a nature, and two months later he was writing in a very different strain. He was penning a despatch about the young Khedive, he told Lord Rosebery in a private communication, to which he desired to invite his particular attention. It was, he thought, the most important despatch which he had written since he had been in Egypt; and the burden of it was that the young Khedive was going to cause a very great deal of trouble. He was entirely accurate in his forecast. Abbas II proved precipitate and headstrong. He acted with such precipitation that events easily outstripped the post and, before the despatch in question reached Lord Rosebery, a crisis had arisen—and had been dealt with. The Khedive had dismissed Mustapha Pasha Fehmi and two other Ministers and had appointed others in their places; Cromer had sought and obtained by telegram authority to take such steps as he deemed necessary to counter the action of the Khedive; a compromise on the question of the Ministry had been reached, Riaz Pasha being recalled to the head of affairs in place of Fakhry Pasha, the Khedive's nominee, and the Khedive himself had agreed to adopt the advice of Her Majesty's Government on all questions of importance in the future. The Khedive had sprung his *coup d'état* upon the English Consul-General on January the 15th; he had capitulated on the morning of the 18th.

These hurried happenings had inevitably placed Lord Rosebery in a position of some embarrassment. Cromer had not minced his words in telegraphing his news and in formulating his demands; and just as eight years earlier Lord Granville had requested that his more vigorously worded communications might be marked private, so that they might be excluded from the category of "Cabinet papers,"<sup>1</sup> so now Lord Rosebery preferred a similar request—"Pray remember very carefully the distinction between telegrams—it is only those marked *private*

<sup>1</sup> See back, Chapter XI., p. 120.

that I consider as personal to myself – all the others go into the hands of my sixteen colleagues. There are many *nuances* of the situation that, without any disloyalty to them, are better only seen by me.” The same hint was contained in a telegram from Sir T. Sanderson despatched to Lord Cromer on January the 20th – “ You may count on Lord Rosebery’s support. But the attitude of French Government is very stiff and their Press is violently excited . . . Lord Rosebery’s difficulties in the Cabinet are, as you may suppose, considerable. Pray avoid in your official telegrams expressions which can be laid hold of.” And, quite apart from the form in which they reached him, the substance of the messages which the *Foreign Secretary was receiving – not from Cromer only* – was sufficiently disturbing. “ I am just off to Cabinet with your three last telegrams. The heavens look stormy,” he wrote on January the 20th, and, as if as an afterthought, “ The French, by the bye, complain of your using the Khedive somewhat roughly in conversation. I hope this is not true, as he is a high-spirited boy ; and such Princes are liable to burn houses to roast pigs, or risk a firework that may blow their own heads off.”

The crisis of January 15th-19th was scarcely over before fresh and even more menacing tendencies manifested themselves. Out of the excitement which had been generated there emerged serious symptoms of anti-European and anti-Christian feeling. “ That portion of the Press which represents ultra-Mohammedan feeling,” Cromer telegraphed on the afternoon of January the 19th, “ has assumed a very violent and mischievous tone ” ; and he added that in his own opinion, and in that of the General Officer in Command, the garrison should be strengthened.

Looking at events in retrospect, it is difficult to arrive at any other conclusion than that from this point of view the appointment of Riaz Pasha on the 18th had been unfortunate. When Cromer had agreed to his appointment to the Premiership on the fall of Nubar Pasha in June,

1888, he had had in mind, amongst other things, the desirability which he had once mentioned to Lord Salisbury, of rallying orthodox Islamic opinion to the Government.<sup>1</sup> The attempt to do so had not been altogether successful. It had, in fact, been attended with certain disadvantages. "Taking an all-round view," Cromer had written in the spring of 1890, "the machine has worked better and more smoothly under Riaz than under Nubar. But there is a distinct tendency towards the revival of arbitrary proceedings such as torture, and also a recrudescence of Mohammedan fanaticism. Both are important, but the latter is in reality the most important question of the two. . . . If there were no army of occupation the Syrian newspaper editor who makes unpleasant remarks about the Prophet's wife would have a very unpleasant time of it. Of that I have little doubt."<sup>2</sup>

Riaz was, in fact, a staunch Muslim whose presence at the head of the Government could, and sometimes did, produce a tranquillizing effect on Muslim public opinion. But he was by nature despotic, and thought that "when laws or regulations clashed with his ideas of what was right and wrong they should be broken."<sup>3</sup> He had rendered yeoman service to Egypt during Cromer's earlier years in the country ; but he had shown that with his peculiar temperament he was not always able to work the delicate system of Government which had grown up under the British occupation. "Riaz is becoming quite ungovernable," Cromer had telegraphed in January 1891 ; and he had made it clear that there might have to be a change. Lord Salisbury, with his eye on certain not too friendly elements in Europe, had been a little perturbed – "My fear is lest we should bring our domination in Egypt so forcibly before the mind of the ordinary French elector that he will force his Government to be troublesome to us on the subject, and your position as *Maire du Palais* will be too plainly revealed if Riaz follows Nubar

<sup>1</sup> In a letter dated May 1st, 1887. See back, Chapter XIV., p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> To Lord Salisbury.

<sup>3</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 345.

at the distance of two years and Fehmy follows Riaz at the distance of two months."<sup>1</sup> And he had been proportionately glad when the immediate difficulty had been surmounted – "I am glad you have got your judicial reforms without parting with Riaz. Any mask that conceals the English power in Egypt from the eyes of the French journalist or elector is a thing to be preserved."<sup>2</sup> The accommodation had, however, been of a transient nature, and on May the 14th Riaz Pasha had fallen. "We got through our crisis happily enough, and with very little fuss and commotion," Cromer had written two days later. "It came at a particularly fortunate moment; and, moreover, Riaz had a quite providential quarrel with the Frenchman at the same time as he quarrelled with the Khedive. Everyone here seems well pleased with the change."

Such being the man, there were obvious risks in restoring him to power under a young, headstrong, and inexperienced Khedive searching round for some means of asserting himself. The most obvious risk was that he would encourage his master to play to the Muslim – and therefore anti-European and anti-Christian – gallery. And this is precisely what he did do. Cromer's idea in agreeing to his return to power had been to secure the support of the Muslim element; he was sorrowfully confessing before many weeks had passed that this hope was doomed to failure. Encouraged by Riaz Pasha, the Khedive adopted the rôle of a patriotic leader. For Ismail Pasha he professed unbounded admiration; he spoke of Tewfik Pasha, his father, contemptuously as *le défunt*. He played ostentatiously to the Arabist gallery. "The Khedive," Lord Cromer telegraphed on January the 21st, 1893, "has made a bold stroke to free himself from English guidance. He has for the moment gained enormously in popularity. Riaz Pasha, who could use his influence with the Mohammedan population to allay

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated January 23rd, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated February 13th, 1891.

the excitement, is acting in an exactly opposite sense. I hear of various demonstrations in course of preparation. It is certain that the excitement in Cairo is very great."

On January the 23rd, 1893, Cromer was authorized by Lord Rosebery to inform the Khedive and his Prime Minister that Her Majesty's Government had decided to reinforce the British garrison in Egypt. By a fortunate coincidence, an infantry battalion happened to be passing through the Suez Canal on its way from India, and, within twenty-four hours of the announcement of the impending reinforcement of the garrison, the troops whose homeward journey had been stopped by telegram were marching into Cairo.

The effect of this decisive action was immediate; and, though the general situation remained uncertain, all fear of an actual outbreak of mob violence disappeared. "I rather think the tide has turned," Cromer telegraphed on February the 3rd; "but I cannot speak very positively. I have little doubt that Riaz, Tigrane, and the rest are thoroughly frightened"; and six days later: "I had a long talk with Tigrane Pasha this morning. He declares that the Khedive is all for a good understanding. . . . I shall know more in a few days." Finally, on March the 6th, he was able to wire: "I have just had a long conversation with the Khedive. To all outward appearance he is in a very satisfactory frame of mind. He thanked me very cordially for helping to settle a troublesome question. . . ."

The crisis had been surmounted, and for a time the storm died down. It was to rise again at no very distant date with yet greater violence.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE CRISIS OF JANUARY 1894

SIR RENNELL RODD, who spent eight years of official life in Egypt in close association with Lord Cromer, tells us that on his arrival at Cairo to take up his duties in May 1894, he found his chief "much depressed about the future of Egypt." The cause of his depression was not far to seek. For, quite apart from the danger of sudden outbreaks of violence under the policy of provocation pursued by a Khedive whom he once described as having "a peculiarly catholic capacity for hatred," and a Prime Minister who was "liable to fits of anti-European passion," there was the difficulty of prosecuting the programme of reform which had recently been launched, with a Viceroy at the helm whose vagaries were constantly putting the delicately adjusted machinery of the administration out of gear. And to these stumbling-blocks on the road had been added the uncertainties as to the intentions of Great Britain, which had been stirred to life once more by Mr. Gladstone's speeches in the autumn of 1891, followed by his return to power in August 1892.

Cromer's apprehensions on this score, in spite of the presence of Lord Rosebery at the Foreign Office, bear witness to the extent of his mistrust of Mr. Gladstone's statesmanship. The tone of some of the observations in this connection in his telegrams to the Foreign Secretary likewise bears witness to the gravity of his fears. Lord Rosebery made generous allowance for his feelings ; and, if he sometimes took exception to the phrasing of his communications, he did so, nevertheless, with a sympathetic understanding of Cromer's point of view.

"I well know the stress and strain under which you have been labouring," he wrote, "and I can well understand that under those circumstances telegrams are not so calmly studied as in the sylvan seclusion of Berkeley Square." Moreover, the justification for the Consul-General's anxiety was not lessened by some of Lord Rosebery's own admissions. "You ask me," he wrote on January the 27th, 1893, "to restrain the language of my colleagues – a superhuman task which not King Æolus, who shut the winds in his cave, could accomplish. But I have asked them to be careful."

On January the 21st, when the events described in the last chapter were agitating the official world both in London and in Cairo, Cromer had telegraphed a message which amounted almost to a cry of despair – "A very firm front might, perhaps, even now re-establish the old order of things ; but at any moment some incident may occur which will immensely increase the difficulties of the situation." To this communication he had received an ominous reply – "I can only answer your private telegram in these words : There is a Cabinet on Monday, and if you do not receive the powers you ask on Monday evening, the Foreign Office will have passed into other hands." It was clear that the crisis of January was not confined to Cairo ; and in Cairo it was not restricted to the actual happenings, for Cromer himself was on the brink of a crisis in his own career. The critical nature of the position as it affected him was made known in a telegram to Lord Rosebery on January the 22nd :

"I am very grateful for the confidence shown me  
 "in your private telegram. I have little doubt of  
 "the result, but I need hardly say that if you should  
 "unfortunately leave the Foreign Office, I shall follow  
 "your example in my smaller sphere. The result  
 "will almost certainly be that many of the high  
 "English officials here will resign or be dismissed –  
 "in fact, the whole machine will collapse."

Fortunately, as has been explained, Lord Rosebery prevailed, and the crisis passed, first in London, and, as a necessary consequence, in Egypt. "I have gained my point, but not without effort," Lord Rosebery telegraphed on January the 23rd; and he added a word of caution: "You may, as you know, rely on me to the best of my ability, and, as you have the strength and authority, do not disdain the suavity so expedient in dealing with a rash youth, both sore and headstrong." Lord Cromer took the mild reproof implied by these words in good part. He expressed regret that his telegrams had proved embarrassing, but begged Lord Rosebery to remember that he was "walking on the thinnest of ice." He need have no fear that he would not be sufficiently suave in manner with the Khedive. "I have had too much experience to make any mistake in that direction. I have good reason for knowing that personally he feels no hostility to me; but for a long time past he has had dinned into his ears that, as Mr. Gladstone was in power, he could attempt anything—hence the recent crisis."

It was not enough, however, to have surmounted the immediate crisis; there was the future to be considered, and Lord Cromer drew up an appreciation of the situation for Lord Rosebery. He feared that "this most foolish boy" would force the whole Egyptian question upon them. He refused to lend himself to the situation which had grown up under his predecessor:

"He wishes not only to appear to govern himself, but to do it actually. He will not listen to any advice. The result is, I am brought out of my hiding-place. The reality which before was only known to a few behind the scenes, becomes patent to all the world. This is enough to shatter the system. I fear we must devise something else. We must either go backwards and withdraw from the country, or forwards and assert ourselves more strongly than heretofore. The former, under whatever safeguards, means the collapse of all the reforms

“and the certainty of another Egyptian question ;  
 “the latter means the risk of European complications.  
 “My personal opinion is in favour of the latter as the  
 “least of two evils, but that is a matter for the Govern-  
 “ment to decide. The worst course of all is to drift  
 “on without any positive idea of what we want, or  
 “what we mean. It was the adoption of this latter  
 “line which was the cause of all our difficulties when  
 “Mr. Gladstone was in power before. I could develop  
 “all these arguments at length, but what I have said  
 “above really contains the gist of the whole question.”<sup>1</sup>

The English officials in the service of the Egyptian Government were naturally perturbed. They reposed great confidence in Cromer, and they understood his reasons for refusing to intervene constantly in an attempt to smooth away the difficulties which were bound to crop up between them and the Ministers whom they served, in the absence of a spirit of genuine goodwill. But Cromer thought it desirable to warn Lord Rosebery that there were limits to their endurance. “When they see a dead-set is being made at them, that their positions are being undermined, and, in fact, that the situation created for them is almost untenable, they will ultimately say, What is to be the end of all this? Are we to be supported, or are we not? And unless the whole machine is to collapse I shall be obliged to support them. This is the situation which we are approaching, and, I fear, approaching rapidly.”<sup>2</sup>

Their position was, indeed, anything but pleasant. There could be no doubt of the sullen hostility of the whole Ministry. “English officials are being practically boycotted, and so also are natives who sympathize with England,” Lord Cromer wrote on March the 24th. It was not surprising in these circumstances that the English officials should urge the difficulty of their position upon the Consul-General with increasing persistency. Cromer was, nevertheless, determined to choose his own

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Rosebery, January 22nd, 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated March 17th, 1893.

time and his own ground for the encounter which he knew must come. "Although I have been a good deal pressed by the English officials," he wrote on March the 31st, "I have not taken up any particular question; but I occasionally hold up the forefinger of warning, and say that generally I am not at all pleased. This produces an impression that there is thunder in the air, although there are no particular signs of a storm."

Yet, in spite of the tension in the atmosphere, the days passed without further serious disturbance, and, by the end of April, Cromer reported that it looked as if they might jog on for some while without another breakdown. And when, with the coming of the hot weather, the Khedive retired to Ramleh to nurse his health, which was suffering somewhat as a result of over-indulgence at the table, and to prosecute a quarrel which he had mercifully picked with his mother - "I say mercifully," Cromer wrote, "because it is better that he should quarrel with his mother than that he should do so with the English officials" - there was a further improvement in the general situation which justified Cromer in writing towards the end of May, "We shall probably have a quiet summer, and I look forward to shooting my grouse peacefully, without fear of a sudden recall from Caithness-shire to Cairo."

In this forecast he proved correct. The Khedive, whose Turcophobia had undergone some change in the hope that he might find an ally in this quarter in the pursuit of his anti-English policy, embarked during the summer for Constantinople, taking with him Tigrane Pasha and a large *entourage* and thus removing temporarily from the seat of possible trouble in Egypt much inflammable material. In the prosecution of his hates Abbas II was nothing if not thorough. For the edification of his Suzerain, the Sultan, an elaborate anti-English demonstration was carefully staged. With a view to reinforcing his own representations, a deputation of Egyptian sheikhs was organized and despatched to the

Golden Horn. The whole thing was palpably theatrical, and ended in a dismal failure. In the pages of a small volume on Abbas II, Cromer himself gives an entertaining illustration of the hollowness of the claim that the mission of the sheikhs represented any real or spontaneous antagonism to England :

“ An aged sheikh who was known to be an Anglophile  
 “ was asked why he had signed the petition. He  
 “ smiled and answered, ‘ It is all empty words. I  
 “ ‘ often say to my camel or to my horse, if in some  
 “ ‘ trifling way he tries my patience, “ Curses on  
 “ ‘ “ you! May Allah strike you dead, O son of a pig! ”  
 “ ‘ If I thought it would really happen, I should be  
 “ ‘ silent ; but I know that the beast will remain  
 “ ‘ unharmed. So also I know that the English will  
 “ ‘ stay here, whether I sign a petition or not. What  
 “ ‘ does it matter, then ? I please our lord the Khedive ;  
 “ ‘ the English remain all the same and look after my  
 “ ‘ interests, and everyone is happy all round. ’ ”

Moreover, during the absence of the master, the servant had been strutting the stage in royal manner. Riaz Pasha had been addressed as Effendina, a title ordinarily reserved for the Khedive ; and he had shown no displeasure at the subtle compliment. Military guards had been turned out for him, and on such occasions not one, but two, bugles had been blown in his honour. No wonder that Abbas II returned to his own capital in no very genial frame of mind.

To Cromer’s practised eye it was at once apparent, on his return to Egypt in the autumn, that in the political atmosphere the barometer had fallen ; and he lost no time in warning the Foreign Secretary in London :

“ I am not at all happy about the situation here. The  
 “ preparation of the Budget and the return from leave  
 “ of a number of high English officials bring up for  
 “ solution a number of questions, some small, some  
 “ rather larger, which have been allowed to sleep during  
 “ the summer. Riaz is bitterly and unreasonably

“hostile to Europeans generally, to the English in particular, and perhaps most of all to myself, whom he identifies with the cause of English predominance. . . . It is a pity that the summer is not ever-lasting in Egypt. The autumn and winter always bring up a crop of troubles.”<sup>1</sup>

Some indication of the particular subject over which the inevitable storm was about to break was given in a brief telegram from Lord Cromer to Lord Rosebery on October the 31st – “I am not at all easy about the situation. The calm on the surface is quite fallacious. One of the most serious points, I think, is that Maher Pasha . . . is acting as the Khedive’s personal agent, and secretly alienating the army from its English officers.”

On January the 6th, 1894, he informed Lord Rosebery of an intention on the part of the Khedive to visit the frontier of his dominion :

“The Khedive is about to visit Wadi Halfa, so I shall not see him for a month. There is so much general irritation here, that I thought it as well before he left to talk to him on the subject. This I did yesterday. I alluded to the anti-European spirit which was abroad. I said that it might become dangerous ; that I was anxious not to interfere too much, but leave the initiative to him ; that if the present state of things went on I might be obliged to step in. I hinted at a change of Ministry.”

The Khedive’s manner was disarming ; and Cromer admitted that he was still an enigma to him. “All I can say is that, if he is thoroughly false . . . he plays his part in a manner which is quite astonishing for a youth of twenty years old.”

The point in doubt was soon laid to rest. On January the 19th the English Consul-General received a telegram from General Kitchener at Wadi Halfa informing him that, in consequence of various observations “disparaging to the English commanding officers” made by His Highness the Khedive on parade, he had tendered his

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Rosebery, October 29th, 1893.

resignation. Cromer at once realized, not only that the matter was one of the utmost gravity, but also that here at last was sound ground on which to do battle. A public disparagement of the English officers by no less a person than the Khedive, whose anti-English sentiments were notorious, coming as it did on the heels of tortuous incitements to the troops to rebel against them, was a matter of real and very serious import. England in her relations with Oriental races had had experience of the dire consequences of the mutiny of native troops against their English officers. A generation had passed since the foundations of British rule in India had been shaken by such an uprising ; but much more recently Egypt herself had had experience of an upheaval due to a military revolt. And it was painfully apparent to many that the breeze of fanaticism which had begun to blow many months before had not subsided. The European community generally were in a state of apprehension. The Marquis de Reverseaux, the French representative, who could scarcely be acquitted of encouraging the Khedive and his Ministers in their anti-English sentiments, was known to have shown some alarm in conversation with an Austrian resident – “ Nous avons voulu évoquer le sentiment national, et nous n'avons fait qu'évoquer le sentiment fanatique.”

Cromer was, in fact, being pressed *to do something* – “ an expression,” he told Lord Rosebery, “ which always inspires me with a feeling that I must proceed with great caution.” Still, the situation was unpleasant. Even Egyptians who were friendly to the English occupation were becoming perturbed, and, after the manner of the East, were demanding a sign. What sign could be given them ? “ We cannot hang Tigrane in Abdin Square in order to assert ourselves,” Lord Cromer commented. With his customary patience and restraint he bided his time, determined to take action only when he was afforded an opportunity of striking which would be comprehensible to the public in England on the one hand and would



provide no reasonable grounds for foreign interference on the other. That opportunity had now been given him. Immediately on receipt of General Kitchener's telegram he saw the Prime Minister and Tigrane Pasha and demanded, in the first place, the removal of Maher Pasha from his office and, in the next place, the issue of an order of the day couched in such terms as would effectually counteract the effect of the Khedive's words. The Ministers, realizing that a serious mistake had been made, prevailed upon the Khedive to yield. He wrote a letter to General Kitchener which was published in the *Official Journal* commending the services rendered by the English officers to his army ; Maher Pasha was removed from the War Office and a nominee of General Kitchener's was appointed Under-Secretary for War in his place. A blunder of the first magnitude from his own point of view had been committed by the Khedive, for, with his enforced acceptance of the English Consul-General's terms, the bubble of his own importance had been pricked.

It was inevitable that these happenings should lead sooner or later to the fall of the Ministry. So long as his Prime Minister co-operated with him in his anti-English policy, the Khedive was prepared to tolerate him ; it was an entirely different matter when he counselled him to follow a line of action which involved his own humiliation. Cromer was anxious to postpone a Ministerial crisis, at least for a time. "The whole machinery of Government in Egypt," he told Lord Rosebery, "is too delicate to stand many shocks such as it has received recently. It is like trying to alter the works of a Geneva watch with a pickaxe." But he did not think that a change could be long postponed.

A few weeks later Lord Rosebery left the Foreign Office on becoming Prime Minister, and Cromer reported to Lord Kimberley, who had succeeded him as Foreign Secretary. On March the 26th he wrote that it was rumoured that the Khedive was anxious to get rid of his

present Ministers; a fortnight later he wrote more definitely :

“ There cannot be a shadow of doubt that the Khedive  
“ wants to get rid of his Ministers. There can be  
“ equally little doubt that they are thoroughly dis-  
“ credited and that almost everyone wishes them to  
“ go. . . . The sole reason why the Ministers now remain  
“ in power is because the Khedive is afraid to speak  
“ to me.”

He thought that the Ministers themselves might soon find their position intolerable and tender their resignations ; and this is, in fact, what happened. Riaz Pasha resigned ; the Khedive accepted his resignation, and the now aged Nubar Pasha reigned once more in his stead.

Looking back on the troubled days of the winter and spring of 1894, Cromer saw in them a second turning-point in the history of England in Egypt, since it was during these weeks that the battle for British supremacy was fought and won. With characteristic self-effacement he ascribed the successful issue of the engagement to others, and in particular to Lord Rosebery, without whose cordial and constant support, he declared, he would have been “ quite powerless.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE SUDAN ONCE MORE

THE series of political crises which marked the first three years of the Khedive Abbas's viceroyalty, had necessarily impeded somewhat the progress of reform; for reform was a delicate exotic in the soil of Egypt, requiring careful tending and constant watchfulness. A superficial acquaintance on the part of the Egyptian with modern scientific practices, without any understanding of the theories on which the practices were based, led often enough to situations of some absurdity. In company with the German Consul-General, Cromer had on one occasion spent six days in quarantine. He described the experience in a letter to Lord Iddesleigh. As part of the process he had seen "a very dirty Arab come on board a P. & O. ship, which was a model of cleanliness, armed with a watering-pot, and water a portion of the deck with some very malodorous fluid. This was called disinfecting the ship."

It was clearly difficult for the English Consul-General and the small band of European officers in the service of the Egyptian Government to keep their eyes on all these matters when all their energies were directed to keeping the central mechanism from coming to smash. Troubles due to the hostility of the Khedive and to the inconstancy of his Ministers did not cease after the year 1894, but they had lost much of their power to injure, and were more easily overcome. The Nubar Ministry, for example, was of brief duration. Nubar Pasha himself was feeling the burden of years; he was, moreover, a sick man, and cholera was taking its toll of life in the Nile valley. It was said that an astrologer had predicted that he would die in office; office, consequently, had lost something of

its former glamour. Why go out of one's way to afford a rascally astrologer the satisfaction of proclaiming himself a true prophet? Nubar Pasha saw no good reason for doing so. He therefore resigned, and departed from the country. Cromer viewed the situation with comparative complacency. In order to be prepared for possible emergencies, he applied to Lord Salisbury for "a little bottled thunder." As matters turned out, the necessity for "drawing the cork" did not arise.

It was not for long, however, that he was to be allowed by Fate to proceed unhampered with the prosecution of his programme of reforms, though the next serious interruption was caused, not by a crisis from within, but by developments beyond the Egyptian frontier. Quite unexpectedly, in 1895 there arose once more the question of the Sudan.

In April of that year Lord Rosebery, who, as Prime Minister, still took a keen interest in the affairs of Egypt, put certain pertinent questions to Cromer in a private letter. Were the Egyptian Government at all interested in, or disquieted by, the threatened advance of France in the direction of the Upper Nile? Had the Egyptian Government shown any recent desire to move towards Dongola? Would it be difficult for the French to undertake an advance into the Bahr-el-Ghazal, and what would be the nature of their difficulties? Lord Cromer replied to these questions at length in a letter dated April the 12th. The Egyptian Ministers were undoubtedly a good deal agitated about the advance of the French on the Upper Nile. The matter had attracted a good deal of attention in the native Press. In the opinion of his military advisers, the French would have little difficulty in capturing the Bahr-el-Ghazal. It was equally certain that Egyptian opinion generally favoured the reconquest of the Sudan, and in particular of Khartoum. If the Ministers kept their opinions to themselves, it was because they believed that Cromer himself was very strongly opposed to any advance. In this belief, he added, they

were correct. "... I have always been so afraid of the soldiers and others getting the bit in their teeth and running away with one, that I have persistently put forward the objections to the adoption of a forward policy. ... The Sudan is worth a good deal to Egypt, but it is not worth bankruptcy and extremely oppressive taxation." He admitted that the situation was altered by the presence of the French in the neighbourhood of the Upper Nile, and he was afraid in these circumstances that the question might be forced on them prematurely.

With this latter possibility in view, he set forth lucidly and dispassionately the advantages and the disadvantages, and in particular the special risks of the situation towards which they appeared to be moving. What, he asked, were the facts of the Egyptian problem in its international aspect? They were clear enough:

"In all Egyptian matters we have for the last twelve years been continually moving round in a circle, and we always arrive at the same conclusion - namely, that we must either yield to the French and make the best terms we can with them, which, under the given conditions, must almost of necessity be very bad terms for us, or, if we take any decisive step on our own account, we risk a very serious quarrel with France."

Very well, then, it was for the Government to decide whether the advantages to be gained by asserting themselves in Egypt and the Sudan were worth the risk of a war with France. "It will be quite time enough to slip the leash when responsible politicians think that the time for coursing the hare has come." At the same time he made clear what his own answer to that somewhat embarrassing question would be. "Eleven years ago I said that the ultimate solution of the Egyptian question would depend on the relative naval strength of England and France. At the time no one believed me. I hold to that opinion more strongly than ever now. The force of circumstances, much more than the faults of any Ministry or of

any individuals, has driven us into a situation which renders war a not improbable solution of the whole mess. . . . I wish the works at Gibraltar were finished.”<sup>1</sup>

In short, Cromer's attitude towards the question of the Sudan had never varied. He had always contemplated its reconquest by Egypt so soon as, but no sooner than, Egypt was in a position to undertake the enterprise without risk to her own financial stability. He had set his face rigidly against any attempt to retrieve the disaster of the Gordon Mission when an outraged public opinion in England was clamouring for immediate measures, and was dragging even Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues in its wake. He had adopted very provisionally in his own mind a period of approximately a quarter of a century before the condition which he laid down as a prerequisite of any advance was likely to be fulfilled. But, now that a new and unforeseen factor had been imported into the problem in the shape of a French move in the direction of the head waters of the Nile, he regretfully but quite definitely faced the probability of having to move before he had intended doing so. For if France was allowed to establish herself in those regions, there would be an end of all ideas of the reconquest of the Sudan by Egypt. “More than this,” he told Lord Rosebery, “it is obvious that if any civilized Power holds the waters of the Upper Nile, it may in the end be in a position to exercise a predominating influence on the future of Egypt. I cannot, therefore, help thinking that it will not be possible or desirable to maintain a purely passive attitude much longer.” The alternative policy of withdrawing from Egypt which had been considered so often in the past should no doubt be reviewed once more ; but, so far as he was concerned, in spite of all that could be said for it, it was not a policy which he could recommend.

“For many reasons, which I need not state at length,  
“I consider it practically impossible of execution ;  
“therefore, on the whole, and after much reflection, I

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Rosebery, April 13th, 1895.

“ am opposed to it. But, as I have been saying for  
“ some time past, if we do not move backwards, we  
“ must sooner or later move forwards. The only ques-  
“ tion, if this view be allowed to obtain, is, when and  
“ how we shall move forward.”

Nothing illustrates better than does his attitude towards the question of the Sudan those qualities which, had he been the master instead of the servant, would have placed Cromer in the foremost rank among statesmen, and which, since he was the agent, and not a member, of the Government, made of him so invaluable a servant. Pre-eminent among these qualities were his foresight and his patience, his imperturbability and the poise of mind which enabled him to sum up and to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of any particular course of action ; to estimate with uncanny accuracy the chances of success, and to face large risks with unruffled calm. And it is worth while looking a little more closely than his own account of the problem of the Sudan in the pages of *Modern Egypt* enables us to do, at the predominant personal part which from first to last he played, albeit in the seclusion of the wings, in this particular historical drama.

In the mad flurry of excitement which arose in England on the receipt of the news of Gordon's fate, many people, and some very eminent persons among them, undoubtedly a little lost their heads. The sort of state of mind into which the Government had worked themselves was made clear to Baring by an observation of Lord Granville's in a letter written in January 1885. “ It is extremely desirable,” the Foreign Secretary wrote, “ that we should do something both for the thing itself and for home consumption. We shall have a rough time of it in Parliament about Egypt. . . .”

Now this was precisely the sort of reason for action which Baring most profoundly distrusted ; and he awaited further explanation of the Government's intention with some anxiety, all the more so in that he knew how powerful was the pressure which was being brought to bear on

them to induce them to embark upon a programme of extensive military operations. With scarcely a dissentient voice, their military advisers were proclaiming the necessity, in the interests of the security of Egypt, of smashing the Mahdi. Great play was likewise being made by others, of the alleged necessity of striking a blow to prevent a general uprising of Islam elsewhere, in spite of the fact, as Baring himself reminds us,<sup>1</sup> that the best authorities on Eastern politics – and amongst them his own particular friend, Sir Alfred Lyall – dissented from this view. “The Mahdi’s fortunes do not interest India,” Lyall wrote to Mr. Henry Reeve. “The talk in some of the papers about the necessity of smashing him in order to avert the risk of some general Mohammedan uprising is futile and imaginative.”

The further explanation which Baring awaited was given by Mr. Gladstone in the House of Commons on February the 19th, 1885 ; but, as so often happened in the case of Mr. Gladstone’s expositions, it required a competent commentator to explain its meaning. Baring, therefore, turned to Lord Granville as the most hopeful person to undertake the work of exegesis. The one matter which appeared to be clear from Mr. Gladstone’s statement was that military operations against the Mahdi were to be undertaken. What precisely, Baring wanted to know, was to be the political object of such operations? “In Mr. Gladstone’s statement,” he told Lord Granville, “I can only fasten distinctly on one political object. . . . I understand it to amount to this – that in the opinion of the Government it is necessary in the interests of England, of Egypt, and perhaps I may add of civilization in general, to strike a blow at the Mahdi which will counteract his recent success and thus stem the rising tide of fanaticism in Egypt and elsewhere.” Would that object be attained by the mere recapture of Khartoum? And, if not, what were the intentions of the Government after Khartoum had been retaken?

<sup>1</sup> In the *Nineteenth Century and After* for February, 1904.



Read and re-read Mr. Gladstone's statement as he would, he could find no indication that the Government had really thought out the question which they were endeavouring to solve. And, since it seemed to him essential that the matter should be carefully thought out before any final and possibly fatal decision was acted on—a decision to advance had actually been taken—he proceeded to do their thinking for them. He admitted the force of the objections to reversing the decision to advance which had already been publicly announced. "Our failure to execute this programme would now almost certainly be attributed to our inability to do so. Nevertheless, unless the Government is prepared to regard the establishment of a settled Government at Khartoum as the primary political object to be gained by the advance on Khartoum, I am clearly of opinion that the advance should not take place." But were the Government prepared to consider the establishment of a settled Government in the Sudan as an object of primary importance? It was not clear from Mr. Gladstone's statement that the Government's mind had reached this point in the very important process of thinking the matter out; and the views expressed in Parliament and the Press appeared to be "fitful and impulsive" to the last degree. "I would, therefore, urge that an answer, which should be devoid of all ambiguity, should be given to this question: Does the English Government intend to establish a settled form of Government at Khartoum or not?" Baring did not deny the difficulty of the question, but he could see no reason for postponing its consideration, and a great many very cogent reasons for not doing so. "If once a clear answer—whether in the affirmative or negative—were given to the question I have propounded above, the ground would be greatly cleared, and we should be able to discuss those questions which remain for consideration with much greater advantage than at present."

But, since no answer to that question had been given,

he proceeded to examine the position first on the assumption that the answer was in the negative, and then that it was in the affirmative. In the event of a negative answer being given, he was clearly of opinion that no advance on Khartoum should be made. On the contrary, they should confine their military activities to protecting the frontier of Egypt against attack.

Supposing, however, that an affirmative answer were to be given to the question which he had propounded, what would be the proper course to pursue? In the first place, they should resume offensive military operations at as early a date as considerations of climate and transport would permit. And the arrangements should be on such a scale as to preclude the possibility of failure. And when success had been achieved, what then? "First we may come to an arrangement with the Sultan under which Turkish troops will be employed to maintain order in the Sudan. Secondly, we may arrange for the Italians to take over the country. Thirdly, we may establish some quasi-independent ruler who would be subsidized by Egypt or by England. Fourthly, we may in some form or another establish English rule in the Sudan." All these alternatives were discussed in detail, and special stress was laid upon one important consideration consequent upon the adoption of the fourth :

"It appears to me that it would almost necessarily  
"lead to a reconsideration of the Egyptian situation.  
"It is very probable that our occupation of Egypt  
"will, in any case, be a long one. If we are to become  
"responsible for the government of the Sudan, I think  
"we may at once, for all practical purposes, abandon  
"any hope of getting away from Egypt at all. Under  
"these circumstances, it would become a very open  
"question whether it would be advisable to continue  
"the present system of government in Egypt. It is  
"a highly delicate mechanism, and its efficient work-  
"ing depends very greatly on the judgment and  
"ability of a few individuals. Its continuance can  
"however, be justified if we are able to keep before  
"our eyes the possibility of evacuation, even at a

" somewhat distant future. If that possibility becomes  
" so remote as to be of no practical account, I really  
" see no object in continuing the present system. It  
" would be better for us then to arrange, if possible,  
" with the other Powers that we should take over  
" the government of the country, guarantee its debt,  
" etc."<sup>1</sup>

Lord Granville had the letter of which I have given a very brief summary—it was a document of eight large quarto sheets of print—circulated; and it is easy to imagine the effect of so lucid and logical a presentation of the case upon the minds of Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues. It was probably decisive. At any rate, the decision to advance on Khartoum was cancelled. Lord Granville wasted few words in informing Baring of the conclusions at which the Government had arrived. "Views of Cabinet are much in accord with the three conclusions in your long private letter," he telegraphed on April the 15th; and two days later he wrote:

" Next week will be momentous. I believe we shall  
" be violently abused, but that it will be an immense  
" relief. It is difficult to defend the two opposite  
" decisions, but my withers are unwrung."

Baring had gained his point and he was left free to pursue his policy of reform in Egypt unhampered by the anxieties inseparable from prolonged and hazardous military operations beyond her borders. Minor operations on the frontier became necessary from time to time; but these gave cause for no great anxiety. "I think that, for the present at all events, we may be pretty happy about the Sudan," Baring told Lord Salisbury in October 1889. "The Dervishes have now been well beaten, both at Suakin and in the Nile valley. It is not probable that they will advance again for some while, if at all." These potential invaders of the Egyptian frontier even had their uses—"... the Dervishes, without being really dangerous, are fulfilling the very useful

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Granville, April 3rd, 1885.

function of providing an argument against any change.”<sup>1</sup>

It was only when other nations became active in the theatre of the Sudan that Cromer began to fear the possibility of his hand being forced. “I am rather anxious about the Italians,” he wrote in November 1894. “If the Dervishes come on, I presume they will be beaten; but then will not the Italians want to go on beyond the line fixed by Lord Dufferin’s Convention? Very probably they will do so. This would be awkward. I am always fearful of having this abominable Sudan question forced on us prematurely.”<sup>2</sup> With this possibility present to his mind he thought that there was no harm in preparing the way for an advance which sooner or later must be made. After much trouble he succeeded in arranging, in the spring of 1895, for the continuation of the Nile valley railway as far as Aswan. A little while before he had got a telegraph line laid down from Korosko to the Wells of Murad, half way across the desert to Abu Hamed. “I look on both these measures,” he told Lord Kimberley, “as steps which will facilitate the ultimate reconquest of the Sudan.” To his surprise, Lord Kimberley replied in a sense deprecating any idea of reconquering the Sudan: “The railway to Aswan will be a very beneficial work as regards the defence of the frontier. Whether it will also be a benefit if it leads the Egyptians to embark on the reconquest of the Sudan I am not so sure.”<sup>3</sup> What, then, was the policy of the Government with regard to the Sudan? Cromer thought that he ought to know:

“I am rather perturbed at what you say about the Sudan. As you know, I was strongly in favour of withdrawal, not because the policy was desirable in itself, but because it was unavoidable. On the other hand, I have always thought that sooner or later the Egyptians should go back – so far, at least, as Khartoum. I do not mean to say that they

<sup>1</sup> i.e. against evacuation. Letter to Lord Salisbury, December 11th, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Kimberley, November 9th, 1894.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Lord Kimberley to Lord Cromer, March 22nd, 1895.

“should do so now. All I mean is that they should move when their military and financial resources admit of their doing so. . . . I rather infer from what you say that you think that Egyptian reconquest *per se* is undesirable. Is this so? Surely it is impossible for all time to leave the Sudan in its present condition; and if the Egyptians do not retake it, the French or Italians will some day walk in.”<sup>1</sup>

At this juncture activities on the part of France prompted Lord Rosebery to put the questions to which reference has been made at the beginning of this chapter. In the end, however, it was not French, but Italian, action which was directly responsible for the first move in the reconquest of the Sudan; and it was not a forward, but a backward, move on their part that set in train the Egyptian expeditionary force. The Italians, in fact, were engaged on a little war of their own, and were being hard pressed by the Abyssinians; and on December the 18th, 1895, Cromer informed Lord Salisbury that military opinion in Cairo was to the effect that when news of the Italian defeat reached Khartoum, the Dervishes would very probably either advance on Kassala or try to cut off communication between Kassala and Massowah. Worse was to follow; on March the 1st, 1896, the Italians were heavily defeated by the forces of King Menelek in the neighbourhood of Adua. This led to a request from the Italian Ambassador in London for aid in the shape of a demonstration from Egypt and to yet one more *volte-face* on the part of a British Government. The circumstances will be explained in the following chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Kimberley, March 29th, 1895.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE SUDAN RECONQUERED

**B**Y the autumn of 1895 the plans for the Aswan dam were sufficiently far forward to justify a start being made with its construction, and in November of that year Cromer had consulted the British Government as to their views with regard to the Sudan, since he feared that the resources of Egypt would not suffice to finance at one and the same time so large an undertaking and a considerable military expedition. He had been told in reply that there was no present prospect of the Government consenting to the despatch of a military expedition into the Sudan, and that the financial arrangements of the Egyptian Government might, therefore, be made without reference to the cost of any such enterprise.

In view of this very definite assurance, Lord Salisbury thought it right to explain the reasons for the sudden decision arrived at by the Cabinet in March 1896 to order an advance on Dongola rather than to give their consent to a more modest proposal for a demonstration from Suakin which Cromer had himself put forward with a view to relieving the pressure upon the Italian forces :

“ The decision to which the Cabinet came yesterday,” he wrote on March the 13th, 1896, “ was inspired  
“ specially by a desire to help the Italians at Kassala,  
“ and to prevent the Dervishes from winning a conspicuous success which might have far-reaching results. In addition, we desired to kill two birds with  
“ one stone, and to use the same military effort to plant  
“ the foot of Egypt rather farther up the Nile. For  
“ this reason we preferred it to any movement from  
“ Suakin or in the direction of Kassala, because there  
“ would be no ulterior profit in these movements.”

Here, then, was the die cast. Here, too, was an imperious proconsul absorbed in the work of reform, planning programmes and executing projects, brought up sharp against the blind wall which he had hitherto assiduously and skilfully avoided. He was vigorous and still comparatively young as age counts in these days of longevity ; still, the years were passing and work was pressing. Some day, at some period which, as we have seen, he pushed from him into the still shadowy recesses of the coming century, he had always counted on restoring to Egypt her lost possessions ; but not now. If the decision at which the Government had arrived was to stand, archæology, sanitation, and various other projects which, after many years' waiting, he had hoped to carry out now, would all have to be sacrificed on the altar of military necessity. Surely the soldiers in London had rushed the Government into the business without any adequate knowledge of all the facts ? And when they got to Dongola, would they be much nearer the exercise of a real control over the Nile valley than they were at present ?

Cromer had frequently split a lance with one or other of the Government Departments in Whitehall. Usually it had been with the Treasury ; now it seemed likely that the War Office was about to put an unwelcome finger into the Egyptian pie. If military operations must indeed be undertaken, let the business at least be managed on the spot. He had one very earnest prayer, he told Lord Salisbury, which he wished to address to him :

“ The prayer which I have to address to you is this —  
“ ‘ Save me from the English Departments.’ . . . In  
“ 1884 we succumbed to the Treasury ; we have in  
“ consequence suffered ever since, and we are suffering  
“ now, for most of our financial troubles are due to the  
“ measures adopted in 1884. Now I rather fear the  
“ War Office. Let me implore you to deliver me from  
“ their hands.”

There was, indeed, talk of the despatch of troops from England. This seemed to Cromer to be not only

unnecessary, but extremely undesirable. He feared that if the advance decided on was to be undertaken by an English expeditionary force, control of it would pass out of his hands, unless, at any rate, the force was placed under a commanding officer who could be counted on to work in cordial co-operation with him.

"If an English expedition is eventually sent to Dongola," he begged Lord Salisbury, "I venture to express a very earnest hope that Grenfell will be nominated to the chief command. He is, I believe, a good soldier. He knows the country, the Dervishes, and the Egyptian army. He is very popular with everyone here, and would not cause unnecessary friction. More than all these good qualities, he is, relatively to other soldiers, politically controllable. With Grenfell in command we may, perhaps, be able to stop the British army from marching into the centre of Africa. I would much rather have him than anyone else."<sup>1</sup>

Happily, the rumours of the despatch of a British expeditionary force proved to be ill-founded. Any proposal to send such a force, the Duke of Devonshire wrote on April the 24th, "would meet with the strongest opposition in the Cabinet." And he added: "You will probably have had an explanation of the misunderstanding by which the suggestion of the two brigades by the War Office came to be telegraphed to you." Someone, it seems, had blundered.

This put a different complexion upon the matter. If the advance to Dongola was to be undertaken by the Egyptian Government, we should at any rate be standing on firm diplomatic ground, since the Powers could scarcely take exception to an attempt by Egypt to reconquer territory which had formerly been hers. But, apart from any consideration based upon the international aspect of the case, Cromer was satisfied that, with the Sirdar in command, he could successfully control the

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated April 11th, 1896.



situation. "So long as the force is purely Egyptian," he told Lord Salisbury, "I feel pretty confident the whole thing can be kept under control."

Curiously enough, the fears which Cromer entertained in connection with an English expeditionary force under the general control of the War Office were cherished in London about an Egyptian force under the command of the Sirdar. It seemed that the civilians in both capitals regarded the military machine rather in the light of a live bomb which might be expected to explode in their own hands at any moment. And in London, now that they had set the machine in motion, they were fearful lest they should not be able to stop it again. "I cannot help feeling some disquietude," Lord Salisbury wrote in April, "at the announcement that the Sirdar has bought 5,000 camels." The railway at least could not move; but camels might be taken on to Dongola – "and if it should turn out that the Khalifa's strength has been overrated, the camels will operate on the Sirdar's mind as a powerful temptation to go on to Berber – and possibly to Khartoum. . . . I would much rather see him without those camels, and, of course, if he is entirely supplied by rail and river at Dongola, they will be unnecessary to him." Lord Salisbury's fears were, perhaps, intelligible. He had had recent experience of a military exploit at the other end of Africa; and, though Cromer had written that he did not think that circumstances admitted of Kitchener developing into another Jameson, he had confessed that he was "of a Jamesonian type," and required to be "kept in hand."<sup>1</sup> He had no real fears, however, on that score. Kitchener had bought 2,000, not 5,000 camels. "Of course, like other soldiers he would like to reconquer the whole Sudan," but the idea which seemed to prevail in London that he was inclined to be rash was, Cromer thought, erroneous.

Still, the fear remained. "Several of my colleagues," Lord Salisbury wrote on May the 1st, "are still impressed

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Sir T. Sanderson dated February 9th, 1896.

with the fear that Kitchener meditates an expedition into the wilderness at the head of a string of camels." And when Cromer asked for a contingent of Indian troops to occupy Suakin in place of the Egyptian troops which were being withdrawn to join the expeditionary force, they requested that the contingent should not be unduly mobile, and suggested the omission of the cavalry regiment which was to form part of it. Cromer was patient and conciliatory. "I fully agree as to the force not being too mobile. I tried to get off the cavalry regiment, but Kitchener's argument that he must hold the outposts seems sound; I certainly cannot answer it." Lord Salisbury's view was, apparently, that there was little to choose between the military of London and of Cairo; and he was quite willing to support Cromer in his main contention – "I look forward to our having often to tug hard at the bridle during the next few months, but I expect to find that the Egyptian horse has the better mouth of the two."

Thus it came about that the Sudan campaign of 1896–8 was conducted by the English Consul-General. The War Office assumed no responsibility and issued no orders. In official circles it was spoken of as "a Foreign Office War." The result was, as Cromer put it, that he found himself "in the somewhat singular position of a civilian . . . whose proper functions were diplomacy and administration, but who, under the stress of circumstances in the Land of Paradox, had to be ultimately responsible for the maintenance, and even, to some extent, for the movements of an army of some 25,000 men in the field."<sup>1</sup>

We may be sure that Cromer kept a sharp eye on the cost. "Finance will be our great difficulty," he told Lord Salisbury at the very beginning of the preparations for the advance; and a little later, before it had been decided to leave the conduct of the expedition in Cromer's own hands, he had returned to the subject:

<sup>1</sup> From an article entitled "Army Reform" written for the February issue of the *Nineteenth Century and After* in 1904.

"I wish to draw your very particular attention to one point. . . . The point to which I wish to draw your attention is this. The military question is in reality "a financial question, and, looking at the general "Egyptian tangle, it is quite impossible to separate the "financial from the political question. . . ."

He had asked for Indian troops for Suakin with great reluctance, 'because he foresaw that they would end by having "a considerable financial fray." And in this he was not mistaken. "The Indian expenditure appears to be lavish," he wrote on May the 22nd. "It would have been possible to do all that we required for less than half the money. . . ."

Lord Salisbury was as anxious as was Lord Cromer to see expenditure rigorously kept down. "Of course, we must not refuse you anything that you or the Sirdar think absolutely necessary," he wrote on April the 1st; "but, for the sake of our relations with France, and with a more crusty potentate still—the British Treasury—I am anxious to avoid the introduction of British or Indian troops as long as I safely can." Basing himself on past experience, he doubtless foresaw early and insistent demands for help. "The only cloud is that of finance," he wrote at the conclusion of his letter. "Before the transaction is concluded there will be 'words' between the British Treasury, the Indian Treasury, and yourself. In view of that ordeal, let us keep down the expenses as much as we can." Further representations from Cairo as to the financial difficulty elicited a sympathetic reply. "I hope to induce the Treasury to behave to you reasonably, and not Judaically; but the traditions of the Office are very bad. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

There is no need to tell at any length the story of the actual financing of the expedition; it may be summarized in two or three sentences. Considerable reserves were standing to the credit of the Egyptian Government; but they were in the hands of the *Caisse*. Would the *Caisse*

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Cromer, April 24th, 1896.

release them for the purpose of financing an expedition to the Sudan? By a majority the Commissioners of the Debt agreed to release £500,000, and that amount was paid into the Egyptian Treasury. The opposition of the French and Russian Commissioners was not, however, to be overcome so easily, and they brought an action against the Egyptian Government in the Mixed Courts. The decision, when given, was against the Government. Cromer, who had been preparing for this possibility, was ready to return the money to the *Caisse*, and did so within four days of the issue of the judgment. In the meantime the ground in England had been carefully prepared, and when the need arose the money was forthcoming. The conversion of the Treasury had been completed by Kitchener, who had proceeded to England at the conclusion of the operations which he had conducted during the summer of 1896. "No doubt Kitchener has fully informed you of his experiences here," Lord Salisbury wrote on November the 27th. "His campaign against the Chancellor of the Exchequer was not the least brilliant, and certainly the most unexpected of all his triumphs. But all his strategy is of a piece – the position was carried by a forced march and a surprise. In fact, I had to give my approval at the end of a moment's notice, when the train by which Kitchener was to go away was already overdue. I need not say I was very glad to do so; and the Cabinet, to whom the whole matter was stated on Wednesday, entirely approved." A sum of £800,000, at a modest charge of  $2\frac{3}{4}$  per cent., was advanced by Great Britain, and henceforth Cromer was free to move forward independently of the *Caisse*.

The military operations during the summer of 1896 had been singularly successful. "We are looking anxiously for written accounts of the brilliant little action at Firket," Lord Salisbury wrote on June the 24th of that year; and the battle of Firket, fought on June the 7th, was only the first of a series of equally brilliant achievements. On September the 23rd, Dongola was occupied,

and the objective which Lord Salisbury's Cabinet had set themselves, attained. The achievement of the summer of 1896 has been summed up succinctly by Lord Cromer himself :

"At the cost of 411 lives, of whom 364 died from cholera and other diseases, and of £E.715,000 in money—a figure which bore testimony to the Sirdar's economical administration—the province of Dongola had been reclaimed from barbarism."<sup>1</sup>

But was the objective which the Cabinet had set before themselves when they had taken their decision on March the 12th, 1896, anything more than a purely provisional one? The Cabinet had been inspired specially by a desire to help the Italians at Kassala; they did not hold themselves bound to go even so far as Dongola if their object could be attained with a less advance; "we shall avoid any absolute undertaking to go to Dongola," Lord Salisbury had written on March the 13th, the day after the decision had been taken. But Lord Salisbury was in the habit of looking a little further than those people whose political philosophy was summed up in the words, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." And Lord Salisbury had admitted that he desired to use the military effort which was designed to help the Italians for the additional purpose of planting the foot of Egypt "rather farther up the Nile." When the primary object of the advance had faded out of the picture, as it soon did—Kassala was eventually occupied by an Egyptian force simply because the Italian public had lost interest in the place and no longer cared who held it—what advantage was there in sitting idle at Dongola? "In the spring of 1896," Lord Cromer wrote, "it was possible to adduce reasons of some weight in favour of postponing the reconquest of the Sudan. In the autumn of the same year it was not possible to adduce a single valid argument in favour of remaining inactive, and delaying the completion of the work which had already been begun." The

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 93.

logic of this reasoning was unanswerable ; the first step in the reconquest of the Sudan had been taken ; from the military, the political, and the financial points of view it was desirable that the remaining steps should be accomplished with the least possible delay. All doubt as to the attitude of the British Government was laid at rest when the Chancellor of the Exchequer, speaking in the House of Commons on February the 5th, 1897, declared that Egypt could never be held to be permanently secure so long as a hostile Power was in occupation of the Nile valley up to Khartoum, and that the duty of giving a final blow to the power of the Khalifa devolved upon Great Britain. The advance was accordingly proceeded with. As soon as the railway under construction from Wadi Halfa to Abu Hamed was sufficiently far advanced, the latter place was successfully attacked and taken ; and on August the 31st, 1897, Berber was occupied.

For the final advance on Khartoum it was decided that the assistance of British troops was desirable. The Egyptian army had proved their mettle ; they had shown themselves to be a very different force from the ill-starred rabble that had accompanied General Hicks thirteen years before ; but they had now to defend the large additional tract of territory which they had conquered against the possible attack of an enemy who had been hard hit, but by no means smashed ; and they were not equal to the dual task of defending an extended front against a formidable enemy who at the close of the year 1897 was still "in unpleasantly close proximity," and at the same time undertaking a considerable offensive operation. Cromer made it clear that it was not a British expedition that he wanted. "It would be necessary," he told Lord Salisbury, "that Kitchener should remain in chief command – in fact, there would be no *British expedition*, properly so-called, at all, but rather an Egyptian expedition aided by England." There was also the question not so much of revenue and expenditure as of ways and means ; he must have a cash balance, which at the

end of 1897 he had not got, but which he hoped to obtain by the sale of the Sudan railways. In the meantime, he hoped that he was not to be rushed – “ All I ask is that the financial side of the question should be fully considered, and that the soldiers should not be let loose until some clear understanding has been arrived at as to how the money is to be provided.”<sup>1</sup>

It was not, however, the soldiers who forced Cromer's hand a short time after these words were written, but the Khalifa. Cromer himself had not contemplated a further advance before the autumn of 1898 at the earliest. “ As to an advance to Khartoum next autumn,” he had written in December 1897, “ it seems to me premature to discuss the matter at present.” Within a few days of the despatch of this letter the Khalifa showed signs of embarking on an offensive movement ; and on January the 1st, 1898, Cromer sent the following telegram to Lord Salisbury :

“ It looks as if the settlement of the Sudan business would be forced on us at once. Indeed, if we once begin to send English troops the sooner the whole thing can be settled and the troops brought back the better. You will by this time have received my private letter of the 24th December. Until I hear to the contrary, I shall assume that Kitchener is to be in command of all troops at Wadi Halfa and south of that place.”

And he amplified his telegraphic message in a private letter written on January the 8th :

“ The Dervishes, by obliging us to act prematurely, have placed us in a most difficult position. . . . About the personal questions involved. You will sooner or later hear some military mutterings due to jealousy of Kitchener. . . .  
“ I have not a shadow of doubt that the decision to keep Kitchener in command is wise. It is almost equally important that he should be under me, and

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, December 16th, 1897.

“not under the War Office acting through Grenfell.  
“You know me too well to think that I have the  
“smallest personal feeling in the matter; but the  
“truth is that I feel convinced, from all I have seen here  
“during the last few days, that unless the general  
“control, not only of political, but of military matters,  
“is left in my hands, great confusion might, and  
“probably would, arise. . . .”

The ways and means difficulty was successfully surmounted; but Cromer, with one eye on the future, was now coming round to the view that if it was found to be in any way possible to finance a large constructive enterprise concurrently with the conduct of military operations it would be sound policy from the point of view of Egypt to embark upon the Aswan dam without delay. He put the matter to Lord Salisbury in November 1897 :

“ . . . as the Sudan must in any case be a heavy expense  
“and will yield but little revenue for a long time to  
“come, we have to look about and see whether  
“Egyptian resources cannot be increased in other  
“directions. I know of only one way to attain this  
“object in any considerable degree, and that is to  
“construct the reservoirs. I think, therefore, I shall  
“probably return to the charge on this subject before  
“long.”

In December he submitted the question officially in a long despatch on the whole financial situation. “My hope is that you will be able to give me an answer before the end of January,” he told Lord Salisbury. “I am told that the spring is the best time to go to the city.” And he saw to it that consideration of the matter was not lost sight of. “My main object in writing to you now,” he told Sir Michael Hicks-Beach on December the 16th, “is to commend the reservoir question to you. . . . I have devoted a great deal of time and attention to this subject since my return here, and I would earnestly beg of you to consider favourably the scheme which is now put forward.” Cromer had, in fact, made up his



mind to have the Aswan dam built, and he was not going to rest until he got it. In 1896 the importance of constructing the dam and getting on with other reforms had been urged as an argument against embarking in too great a hurry upon the reconquest of the Sudan; in 1898, the cost of the operations in the Sudan was made use of as an argument for speeding up the construction of a remunerative project. "I earnestly hope," he added in a postscript to a letter to Lord Salisbury on January the 8th, 1898, "that all this Sudan business will not involve any delay in settling the reservoir question. The more difficult the financial situation is likely to be, the more is the reservoir required." He waited a week, and then added a postscript to another letter – "I am very anxious to hear of your reservoir decision." By the end of the month permission to proceed with the project was received. Cromer was delighted – "I am very grateful for the reservoir telegram. I feel very confident that you will have no cause to regret having assented to the project." And a month later – "The reservoir business has been a remarkable success here. It is by far the most popular step we have ever taken, all the more so because we have done it ourselves, without French or other co-operation."<sup>1</sup>

There is no need to re-tell in any detail the story of the campaign of 1898, which ended in the destruction of the Dervish hosts under the walls of Omdurman on September the 2nd and the recapture of Khartoum. The story has been told in sufficient detail by Lord Cromer himself in the pages of *Modern Egypt*. Moreover, Cromer was not in Egypt when the final blow was struck. He was fighting another enemy who was threatening to rob him of all that was dear in life, away from the clash of arms and the smoke of battle in a remote shooting-lodge in the distant Highlands of Scotland. Lady Cromer had returned to England in 1898, a sick woman. As a result of consultation with a specialist, she had been

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, February 26th, 1898.

able to send her husband a somewhat reassuring report in which the hope was held out that complete rest might so far restore her health as to enable her to return in due course to Egypt. Cromer continued, therefore, to apply himself to the problem of the Sudan. By July, however, things had taken a turn for the worse, and her medical adviser, Major H. C. Dent, realizing the fatal character of the disease from which she was suffering, asked her permission to write to Lord Cromer. Permission was given on condition that the letter was shown to the patient before it was despatched. It never was despatched, for after reading it Lady Cromer remarked, "That is all very well, Dr. Dent, but I can read between the lines, and that letter would bring my husband home" – and, so saying, she tore the letter up and put it in the fire.<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, was a doctor in a dilemma. He felt certain that Lord Cromer was in ignorance of the critical state of Lady Cromer's health; he felt equally certain that he ought to be placed in possession of the facts. What was he to do? The difficulty was solved by consultation with the Consul-General's sister, then in residence at Cromer, who, on being informed of the facts of the situation, communicated them to her brother in Cairo. Lord Cromer immediately sailed for England.

On his return, Lady Cromer rallied; but he was under no delusion as to the fatal nature of her malady. "I am not going to despair," he wrote on July the 23rd; "cure is impossible, but the Cromer doctor gives her two or three years."<sup>2</sup> Uncertainty hung, a sword of Damocles, suspended by a thread above him. "Matters are a little better so far as my wife is concerned," he informed the same correspondent in September. "She has rallied, but I can hardly believe it possible that the end is far distant. I shall have to risk the journey

<sup>1</sup> See an article in the *Graphic* of January 6th, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Sir Rennell Rodd.

to London. Beyond that I can at present make no plans."

Lady Cromer herself was well aware of the danger to her life that would be involved in a journey to Egypt ; her doctor had flatly refused to accept responsibility for agreeing to her undertaking it. But in Egypt events were in rapid progress ; history was being written on the dusty plains before the walls of Omdurman ; and she could not bear to think that the man whose whole life had been given to building anew upon the perished greatness of an ancient land should be kept at such a time far from the scene of his heroic task. With supreme devotion she flung discretion to the winds and embarked upon the journey. She achieved her end, for she saw the hand of the steerer placed once more upon the helm ; but it was her last throw of the dice with Fate, for on October the 16th, 1898, she died.

There is no need to dwell on the stunning nature of the blow. As in the case of the daughter of Laban, Evelyn Baring had served fourteen years for the hand of Ethel Errington. Throughout his married life he had been blessed with that sympathetic and intimate companionship which exceeds in richness all other gifts that the gods have to offer to mortal man. It was a gift which Evelyn Baring prized beyond all else. "I should have to separate myself from my children," he told Lord Iddesleigh, when in 1886 Lord Cross was pressing for his acceptance of the post of Financial Member in India for a second time, "... and probably from my wife also. This to me would be a sacrifice for which hardly anything would compensate." And now the separation which he had always dreaded was forced upon him, not for months, nor even for years, but for all time. He was told that at the memorial service held at All Saints' Church in Cairo after her death, Kitchener burst into tears. "I liked him more for this," Cromer wrote, "than for anything he said or did during the lengthy relations which I had with him." What was a man distraught with grief to do ?

What could he do? He turned to the files lying on his office table. Half an hour after he had bid good-bye to her for all time, he was drafting a long telegram to the Foreign Office on the question of lighthouse dues in the Red Sea. For a hurt so grievous there was only one possible anodyne – grinding, unceasing toil. . . .

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE AFTERMATH OF CONQUEST

THE reconquest of the Sudan with the aid of British troops brought to the surface of the diplomatic waters a host of problems, some great, some small. The first matter to be determined was obviously the status to be accorded to the conquered territory. Before the final advance took place this matter had formed a subject of discussion between Lord Cromer and Lord Salisbury. "I have been thinking over the two-flag idea," the former wrote on June the 11th, 1898, "and the more I think over it the more I like it." And this was, as all the world knows, the solution of this particular problem which was ultimately adopted. When Omdurman fell, the British and Egyptian flags were hoisted side by side upon the citadel; and under an Agreement between the British and Egyptian Governments, signed on January the 19th, 1899, the supreme military and civil command in the Sudan was vested in a Governor-General appointed by the Khedive on the recommendation of the British Government, and irremovable without the latter's consent. Lord Cromer had put forward the plan with no very sanguine hope that it would be accepted. "Lord Salisbury, however, never thought twice on the matter. He joyfully agreed to the creation of a hybrid State, of a nature eminently calculated to shock the susceptibilities of international jurists."<sup>1</sup>

The relations between the Governor-General of the Sudan and the British representative in Egypt required careful consideration, and were not defined without some differences of opinion on the part of those chiefly concerned. "In a desultory manner I have discussed your

<sup>1</sup> Introduction by Lord Cromer to Mr., afterwards Sir, Sidney Low's book *Egypt in Transition*.

Sudanese Constitution with the Sirdar," Lord Salisbury wrote on December the 9th, 1898. "I by no means pledge myself to his verbal criticisms, but in the two main points on which he insists I think he is probably right. . . ." In Lord Salisbury's view, while the Governor-General should be under an obligation to obey orders issued by the British representative at Cairo, his initiative should not be unduly hampered by his having to obtain preliminary approval to all that he wished to do. Too great a measure of centralization would expose them to the danger of "that mania for paper-piling which is the endemic pest of British Departments." Their Constitution should be such that it would stand a fair chance of working when neither Cromer nor Kitchener would be there to control it ; and too great centralization involved "endless temptations to pedantry and circumlocution" when the ordinary official was exposed to them.

Cromer was scarcely likely to boggle at a mere question of the delegation of authority. He was, in truth, precluded from doing so by his own attitude on the question throughout the years of his reign in Egypt. No great servant of the State can ever have inveighed more bitterly or with greater consistency against the evils of undue centralization and departmentalism than did Cromer himself. And the most cursory perusal of what has already been written should suffice to have made it clear that nothing so ruffled his habitual composure as did those things which Carlyle described as "the blind obstructions, fatal indolences, pedantries, stupidities on the right and on the left" of "a world-wide jungle of red tape, inhabited by doleful creatures, deaf, or nearly so, to human reason or entreaty." He might, indeed, himself have been the "agent for a matter colonial" depicted by the fiery pamphleteer as pausing "in amazement, almost in despair ; passionately appealing now to this doleful Creature, now to that, and to the dead red tape jungle, and to the living Universe itself and to the Voices and to the Silences ; and, on the whole, finding that it was an adventure in

sorrowful fact, equal to the fabulous ones by old knights-errant against dragons and wizards in enchanted wildernesses and waste howling solitudes ; not achievable except by nearly superhuman exercise of all the four cardinal virtues, and unexpected favour of the special blessing of Heaven."<sup>1</sup> Had not Cromer himself asserted that " the main thing the man at the head of affairs has to decide is not what he should do, but rather what he should leave others to do for him " ; and that one of the reasons why Egypt had been brought round was that he had never done anything himself that he could get done for him ?<sup>2</sup> In the case of the Governor-General of the Sudan, it was a rooted distrust of the discretion of the soldier, first planted in his mind, perhaps, by the vagaries of Gordon, of which he had had such exasperating experience, that caused him to ask for somewhat rigid powers of control. " I abound in the sense of your decentralizing views," he told Lord Salisbury, " but there must be some sort of general control over the soldiers, or they may lead us into all sorts of trouble."<sup>3</sup>

Throughout his career this particular phobia was a noticeable trait. " I have the greatest respect for the advice of soldiers as regards the conduct of a war," he once told Lord Rosebery ; " none whatever for their opinions as to the policy which dictates war." It governed his attitude towards the memorable controversy which wrecked a great Viceroyalty and shook to its foundations the administrative system of the greatest of the possessions of Great Britain during the opening years of the twentieth century. It was to the credit of the Government that, when faced with the controversy between Lord Curzon and Lord Kitchener, they should have sought the opinion of the English Consul-General in Egypt, and former Member of the Government of India, on a question on which his outstanding knowledge and experience entitled him to speak with particular

<sup>1</sup> *Latter-Day Pamphlets - Downing Street.*

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Sir J. Rennell Rodd.

<sup>3</sup> Letter dated December 18th, 1898.

authority. It was less to their credit that they should have been so little influenced by his advice.

Lord Cromer's opinion of Lord Curzon was a high one ; he regarded him as the most able, as he certainly was by far the most eloquent, exponent of that sane Imperialism to which Great Britain was wedded as a necessity of its existence.<sup>1</sup> But he entertained an equally high opinion of Lord Kitchener in his own sphere. His distrust of soldiers was not, indeed, directed so much against individuals as against those generally who had been brought up in the profession of arms. "The exercise of the military profession," he wrote in 1896, "appears to engender a somewhat unchristian spirit of dislike towards one's military neighbour ; to others who are not soldiers this is at times rather tiresome."<sup>2</sup> And here in 1905, as if to give point to his words written nearly ten years before, were two eminent soldiers, Lord Kitchener and General Sir E. Ellis, displaying a very unchristian spirit of dislike, which to Lord Curzon, who was not a soldier, was more than "rather tiresome."

Cromer, as has been said, entertained a high opinion of Lord Kitchener – so long, at any rate, as he confined his activities within their proper sphere. But he held very definite views as to what constituted the proper sphere of the soldier's activities. In all civilized States the functions of the soldier were supposed to be confined, in the first place, to advising on the purely military aspects of an issue, and, in the second place, to giving effect to any decisions at which the Government might arrive.\* Throughout the operations in the Sudan, when Kitchener was confining himself to the discharge of his legitimate duties, Cromer spoke of him in the highest terms. He was cool, reliable, courageous, and marvellously efficient. "I cannot speak too highly of Kitchener's conduct," he told Lord Salisbury in June 1896. "He has fully justified the confidence which, as you are aware, I always

<sup>1</sup> *Political and Literary Essays*, Third Series.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Lord Salisbury.

\* "Army Reform" in the *Nineteenth Century and After*, February 1904.



entertained in his abilities." He detected in him one extremely rare quality; one, moreover, which appealed with special force to himself; he (Kitchener) was convinced that military efficiency and military economy were not necessarily opposing forces.

But while Cromer spoke thus highly of Lord Kitchener's professional abilities, he was not blind to certain sides of his character and temperament which might cause trouble if not carefully handled. He was a severe taskmaster with a hard and unsympathetic manner. "I have got Kitchener to relax his leave rules in favour of the English officers," he wrote in January 1899. "It is an important point, as everything depends on them, and they are all so terrified of their Chief that they do not dare to state their own grievances." And if his roughshod methods rendered him unpopular with the English officers who served under him, they had more serious results when applied to the native population. During the operations of 1896 his treatment of the Egyptian boatmen, whose assistance was of the utmost importance so long as the question of transport remained a vital one, had not been tactful, with the result that during the following year it had been difficult to get boats except by forced requisitions – a procedure which Cromer, with his greater understanding of the Eastern mind, had been particularly anxious to avoid. The matter was more serious still when similar treatment was accorded to the officers and men of the native army. Kitchener had always scoffed at the idea that the Egyptian army could ever prove dangerous; an opinion which Cromer, who recalled the confidence of the English officers in their men before the Indian Mutiny, did not at all share. Kitchener's "very stern discipline," he felt certain, was causing serious discontent. His autocratic methods were indeed, making themselves widely felt. "He is, I fear, terribly bureaucratic," Cromer reported in April 1899, "and does not see with sufficient clearness the difference between forming a

country and commanding a regiment.”<sup>1</sup> But it was the unrest in the Egyptian army that was giving Cromer chief cause for anxiety. “I must satisfy the army,” he told Lord Salisbury, “otherwise you will have a very big business, political and administrative, on your hands.” Discontent combined, no doubt, with a certain spirit of unrest inspired by the equivocal attitude of the Khedive did, in fact, cause a mutiny in one of the black regiments ; but Cromer had been able to arrange the matter about which, he told Lord Salisbury in May 1899, he was “most anxious,” namely, the pay and pensions of the army in the Sudan ; and the mutiny was suppressed with little difficulty.

There was, however, another aspect of Kitchener’s autocratic temperament which gave Cromer food for thought – he could not brook opposition from any quarter. In October 1897 he telegraphed wishing to resign, on a small difference with the Financial Adviser which, in Cromer’s opinion “was not nearly sufficient to justify such a step.” And thereafter he made it plain that service in Egypt had lost much of its attraction for him :

“His [Kitchener’s] main idea now seems to be to get away from Egypt and obtain some English military command in order to qualify for higher positions later. I would rather he did not go just yet, as, whatever may be his defects, he is unquestionably the best man I know to command the Egyptian army for the present. However, no one is indispensable, and, if he really wishes to go, I do not want to stand in his way.”<sup>2</sup>

When, therefore, the papers in connection with the controversy which had broken out between Lord Curzon and Lord Kitchener in 1905 were submitted to him by the Government in London, with an intimation that

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, December 16th, 1897.

"great weight" would attach to his opinion, he gave his mind to the matter and embodied his views in a Memorandum. He made it clear that he entertained a strong opinion upon the question, and, so far as the main issue was concerned, stated that he thought it would be "a grave error" to abolish the post of Military Member of Council. No opinions on matters connected with native feeling generally were more valuable than those of English officers who had passed their lives in close contact with the native troops. No Commander-in-Chief drawn from the English army, however eminent his professional attainments, could hope to possess the special knowledge of such men. He had always regarded the Executive Council of the Viceroy as "an extremely wise political creation" because it combined both English and Indian experience. And he most strongly deprecated the diminution of the Indian element in this small body, "more especially in connection with all matters affecting that most delicate machine – the native army." So far as the actual administrative difficulty was concerned, he felt sure that by some more precise definition of the functions exercised respectively by the Commander-in-Chief and the Military Member of Council, the inconveniences which it was said resulted from the so-called dual system might be got over.

It was mainly on this point that Cromer insisted – the vital importance of the adequate representation in Council of Indian experience, "and especially of experience in all that pertains to the native troops in cases where the Commander-in-Chief's knowledge and experience are mainly non-Indian." But there were many other reasons for rejecting Lord Kitchener's proposals; they had been stated by the Government of India, by the Viceroy, and by Lord Roberts. In these opinions Lord Cromer concurred. "The Commander-in-Chief should be the servant of the Viceroy and his Council; under Lord Kitchener's system he will inevitably tend to become their master."

Here was a Balaam come to judgment. The Government had said that "great weight" would attach to his opinion. His opinion had been given. It was concise, it was lucid—almost distressingly unambiguous. The change which Lord Kitchener wished, and was determined to bring about, was "radical" and highly "objectionable." It was awkward that the view of the most eminent of the soldiers with first-hand experience of the Indian system—Lord Roberts—seemed to coincide with that held by Lord Cromer. What, then, were the Government to do? They hesitated, and eventually compromised. The Secretary of State hoped that Lord Cromer would regard the compromise as a fair one. The hope was doomed to disappointment. Lord Cromer adhered to the opinion which he had already expressed, and added further reasons for his opposition to the Government's decision. A severe blow, he thought, had been given to the authority of the Viceroy. And as he cast his mind back over his own relations with Lord Kitchener he came to the conclusion that those aspects of his self-centred and masterful character which he had summed up at the time as dangerous had now been largely responsible for the crisis which had arisen. For the master to give the whip hand to the servant was, in his opinion, fatal. When, in 1897, he himself had been threatened by Kitchener with resignation, he had been prepared to dispense with his services. Later he had gone further and had intimated that Kitchener's return to the Sudan was not to be thought of. "When Kitchener left," he told Lord Salisbury in April 1900, "he said something to me about coming back here. I did not encourage the idea, and, from what I now learn,<sup>1</sup> I am persuaded that his return is out of the question. He would not be able to hold the Sudan without a large British force." Why, then, had the Government in 1904 begged Kitchener to withdraw the resignation which he

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to Kitchener's handling of the native army, which had caused violent discontent among both officers and men.

had telegraphed home, and by so doing led him to believe that they regarded him as indispensable? The plea advanced – that the political circumstances in England were such that the Government could ill afford to take a line which would cause “something more than a mere splutter in the Press” – was of all possible pleas the one least calculated to impress Cromer. He refused to be shaken in his belief that the Government had been guilty of an unpardonable surrender.

But to return from this digression to the question at issue in 1899 – what were to be the relations between the Governor-General of the Sudan and the English representative in Cairo? Cromer attached little importance to the actual details of the arrangement which was to govern the relations between the Englishman at Khartoum and the Englishman at Cairo, so long only as they were embodied in a formal instrument which would place the status of the Sudan beyond the possibility of challenge.

“I very much hope,” he told Lord Salisbury in December 1898, “that you will not let the Sudan Convention question drop. The two points about which you wrote to me admit of being settled without much difficulty. . . . The main points, however, are twofold: First, to take steps, which should not be too long delayed, to keep internationalism out of the Sudan; and secondly to devise a plan which will give some legal sanction to legislative and administrative measures. If these two problems are solved I do not much care about the rest.”

Pending the introduction of a code of some sort, matters were being administered in a patriarchal fashion by the soldiers. In the recently occupied Dongola Province a man had been arrested on a charge of murder. In the absence of any law court the officer in command had turned over the investigation of the matter to the village sheikhs. This primitive court had found the man guilty, and had put forward three alternative sentences.

The culprit might be hanged ; or he might have both his hands and his right foot cut off ; or he might be compelled to give a bullock to the family of the murdered man. Either of these three decrees would, it was intimated, satisfy public opinion. This was all very well as a temporary expedient ; but it was open to obvious objection if prolonged ; and in January 1899, Cromer reported that Kitchener's methods were "a little more masterful and peremptory" than was usual in dealing with civil affairs. Not that the working of the patriarchal system was without its humours. "My Sirdar's very drastic method of dealing with civil affairs," Cromer wrote in February 1899, "is a never-ending source of amusement to me. The other day I told him that land speculators were sending money to the Greeks in the Sudan in order to make purchases, and that some little care was necessary, as there were at present no legal means for acquiring a valid title. He replied that he abounded in my view, and would I like him to expel every Greek from the country who bought or sold anything without his consent ? "

Next in importance to the system of Government was the extent of the territory to be included in the Sudan. What precisely was meant by the geographical term "the Nile valley," and where were the boundaries to be drawn ? All sorts of considerations had to be taken into account. Even in the case of territory which we did not wish to occupy ourselves, we had to be careful who were our neighbours. If the French obtained control over the warlike Dinka tribe, Cromer pointed out, they would organize a formidable force which might give infinite trouble. Lord Salisbury thought that the whole of Darfur should belong to Egypt ; but what of Wadai, which abutted on to it ? He did not see how any case could be made out for demanding this tract. It was certainly not in the Nile valley, and the Senussi argument could hardly stand alone - "The French might as well claim that all Roman Catholic countries ought

to belong to France." Lord Cromer had not intended to suggest that we should claim Wadai for ourselves ; what he wished to convey was that it was very desirable that it should not fall into the lap of France.

" Buffer States are the ordinary refuge of destitute  
 " diplomacy, but they have occasionally done good  
 " service. In this particular case, Heaven forbid that  
 " I should suggest our taking in hand the government  
 " of Wadai, but I should rather like to keep the French  
 " out. I have the utmost want of confidence in their  
 " administrative system as applied to subject races,  
 " and I fear that if they let off Muslim rockets in this  
 " combustible little State, some of the sparks might  
 " fall on our territory."<sup>1</sup>

Lord Salisbury was unable even to go this far with his representative. The French, he felt certain, would not observe " the conditions of bufferdom." He was in negotiation with them, and he hoped to reach a reasonable agreement with them ; but for the moment " a fire-eating admiral at Muscat " had rather crossed his path. That, however, is another story which has been told in full elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Many matters of minor importance were disposed of by Cromer in person in the course of a tour of the newly conquered territory. " My trip to Khartoum interested me very much," he told Lord Salisbury on his return to Cairo. " I had to make a small speech ; I hope I did not go further than you wished. Locally it did good. The fear of the missionary had to be removed." Lord Salisbury approved. " Your speeches in the Sudan were much admired. They said exactly what had to be said, and no more." Still some rather delicate topics had been touched on. The letter in which Cromer had explained, rather bluntly, that the fear entertained by the erstwhile followers of the Mahdi that the Christian missionary would

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, February 10th, 1899.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Life of Lord Curzon*, vol. ii., chap. ii., pp. 45-8.

follow in the track of the Christian troops had to be dispelled, had been a private one ; and Lord Salisbury no doubt kept it to himself. But there had been references in Cromer's published speech to the maintenance of " The Sacred Law " ; and there was some doubt as to how far the maintenance of the Sacred Law of Islam might prove to be compatible with the aspirations of the humanitarians in Great Britain for the uplift of the peoples of the Sudan. Lord Salisbury broached the question in a few tactfully worded sentences :

" Balfour is telegraphing to you as to some curious questions which have arisen with respect to fugitive slaves, to inquire what course you would feel yourself bound to follow in that matter in consequence of your promise to sustain *The Sacred Law* ? "

There was, too, a question – here Lord Salisbury probably re-read those significant words in Cromer's private letter concerning the inopportuneness of missionary effort – in which the Church was deeply interested :

" The archbishop also wishes very much to know whether the nomination of an Anglican Bishop of Cairo would embarrass you in any way. . . . He seemed to think that, at all events for a year or two, your speech might be a hindrance."<sup>1</sup>

The archbishop's assumption was undoubtedly correct. In the course of his speech to the sheikhs and notables of the Sudan at Omdurman, Cromer had said that there would be no interference whatever with their religion. At this point he had been interrupted, one of the sheikhs present inquiring if this engagement included the application of the Muslim Sacred Law ? Cromer had replied in the affirmative, thereby giving great satisfaction to his audience. The proposal for the appointment of a bishop for Egypt whose jurisdiction would extend over the Sudan had emanated from the then Bishop of Jerusalem, who

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 3rd, 1899.



contemplated with some concern so large an increase of his own diocese. The bishop had mentioned the matter to the Consul-General, and had spoken, amongst other things, of "the necessity of providing means for the confirmation of Shilluks." The Shilluks had not so far emerged from a state of naked savagery, and the provision proposed seemed to Cromer a little premature. But, quite apart from the merits of the case, the time for its consideration was in his view inopportune. Orientals did not reason very closely. It was quite hopeless to make the mass of the people understand the difference between the action of the English Government and of private individuals who were Englishmen. All they would see would be that the first outward and visible sign of our supremacy in the Sudan was the appointment of a high Christian dignitary. From that to the idea that a general policy of proselytism was to be adopted was a mere step. The archbishop naturally regretted the fact that the English representative took the view that he did ; but he was unable to answer his arguments, and, since the last thing that he wished to do was to cause him any embarrassment, the matter was allowed to drop.

Thus, in one way or another, the many problems incident to the reconquest by Egypt of her former possessions were successfully met ; and, as the curtain fell at the close of the nineteenth century, Cromer was able, in spite of clouds elsewhere, to report hopefully on the position in Egypt :

"It is always dangerous to prophesy, particularly  
"in the East, where the unexpected so frequently  
"occurs ; but, so far as I can judge, I think that,  
"amidst your numerous other anxieties, your mind  
"may be quite at ease about Egypt. For many years  
"past we have not been so quiet. South African  
"affairs have so far scarcely caused a ripple on the  
"political waters. In the absence both of any real  
"cause for discontent and of instigation on the part of  
"the Khedive, Anglophobe agitation may be said, for  
"all practical purposes, to have almost ceased. . . . I

“ see no indications of any special unfriendliness on the  
 “ part of other Powers – in fact, rather the contrary.  
 “ The Frenchman is quiescent, and the German appar-  
 “ ently rather on his good behaviour.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, December 16th, 1899.

## CHAPTER XXII

### ENGLAND AND FRANCE

THE problem which confronted the administrator in the Sudan differed in many material respects from the analogous problem with which, for the past twenty years, Cromer had been grappling in Egypt. In that country the supreme task was one of reform. A system of Government, institutions of a kind, practices – cruel, vicious, and in many ways reprehensible no doubt, but still recognised as part of the prevailing order – existed ; so that the actual work to be undertaken was not so much that of creation as of reconstruction. There were evils such as the *courbash* and the *corvée* which had to be uprooted ; there were institutions which had to be remodelled, customs that had to be reformed.

In the Sudan the circumstances were different. Fifteen years of Mahdism had swept out of existence all vestiges of government. The ten plagues of Egypt itself could not have scourged the land to the south more effectually than had the Khalifa and his savage hordes. The population had been decimated ; such husbandry as had existed had been destroyed as by a flight of locusts.

Yet if the material on which the administrator had to work was sparse in quantity and poor in kind, there was, in the case of the Sudan, at least this in his favour : that he had a clean slate on which to write and – thanks to the Convention of January 1899 – a field free from the paralysing paraphernalia of the Capitulations, the presence of foreign consuls, the multiplicity of jurisdictions, the hindrances to legislation – all those international impediments, in short, which had so seriously retarded progress in Egypt proper.

By contrast, the incubus of internationalism in Egypt

stood out in sharper outline. The extent to which it had acted, and was still acting, as a drag upon the wheel became ever more plainly apparent. In the early days of the British occupation the British element so necessary to provide the drive required to carry the Government forward along the pathway of reform had been restricted to the minimum for fear of fanning the glowing embers of international jealousy into flame. In the vitally important Department of Finance, the Financial Adviser had for long been the only British functionary employed. In the Ministry of Public Works, on whose activities depended the construction and control of those great engineering works to which Cromer looked for the economic regeneration of the country, there had for some years been a single British Under-Secretary aided by a handful of inspectors and technical advisers. And so throughout every department of the Administration. Only, as experience showed that on these lines the task which Great Britain had undertaken must prove incapable of accomplishment, was change in this respect slowly and with difficulty brought about. An addition was made here, another there, until at last, with the appointment of Sir Eldon Gorst as Adviser to the Ministry of the Interior in 1898, after sixteen years of the British occupation, the whole of the Egyptian State Departments were brought under effective British supervision. Concurrently with the gradual introduction of a British element into the actual seat of control, a number of young Englishmen, carefully selected for their character and attainments, had been recruited to fill posts as inspectors, sub-inspectors, surveyors of contracts, and other responsible positions on the executive staff.

Yet, for all these cautious advances in the desired direction, there was enough to remind Cromer, as he surveyed the progress of two decades of strenuous and laborious endeavour, that Egypt still lay manacled and partially impotent in the fetters of internationalism. Who held the key by which alone the handcuffs could be unlocked?

No difficulty in providing an answer to that question. The key reposed safely in the strong-room of the *Directeur politique* at the Quai d'Orsay. Could those who had charge of it be persuaded, whether by argument or by force, to relinquish it? That was a question which it was far less easy to answer; it was one to which Cromer, as he looked this way and that way over the pieces moved backwards and forwards by a multiplicity of players over the Egyptian chessboard, was constantly returning.

The crisis of 1894, as we have seen, had opened the eyes of many people, not excluding those of the French representative in Cairo, to the possible dangers of allowing the Khedive too much rope in the pursuit of his anti-Christian and anti-English policy. It had not been without its influence on the Government in Paris, and during the spring of 1895, Baron de Courcel, the French Ambassador in London, had broached the question of Egypt in the course of an interview with Lord Kimberley.

M. de Courcel was a cautious player of the diplomatic game. He was very careful to see that in making his opening move he exposed none of his pieces to attack. It was almost as if the game was to be a purely practice game, in which the gains or losses on either side were not to count. The conversation, he said, must be regarded as a "platonic talk" – a talk, that is to say, to which no official significance was to be attributed. And what was it that M. de Courcel had to say? The burden of the tale of which, very tentatively, he unbosomed himself was, that while it took long for the French people in the mass to comprehend a political question and its bearing on French interests, they had recently become conscious of the fact that British troops and British officials were still present in Egypt – nay, that they seemed to have rooted themselves in the country almost as if it was their intention to remain there. This, said M. de Courcel, had had the effect of irritating French public opinion; so much so, indeed, that M. Hanotaux feared that at any moment some incident might occur which might cause public

annoyance "to break forth in a flame beyond the power of any French Government to control." There was the fatal sentence out at last. One can almost hear the sharp intake of breath as M. de Courcel's mouth closed after the emission of these winged words; picture the quick lift of the eyes as he sought in the expression of the British Foreign Secretary some indication of their effect. It is probable that the result of his scrutiny was disappointing. Lord Kimberley was, in fact, searching for suitable words in which to convey to M. de Courcel a somewhat similar confidence. It seemed that in England, too, there was a public opinion which had recently become aware of certain activities of France in the Mediterranean which had stirred it to a state, if not of acute irritation, at least of serious apprehension. The erection of fortifications then in progress at Biserta, for example, was causing thoughtful people in England to fear that France was seeking to acquire a large part of the northern coast of Africa. He was happy to think that there had been no overt display of ill feeling towards France, yet there was, beyond question, this deep-seated feeling of apprehension of French designs on the part of thinking people which no English Government could afford to ignore.

Here, then, at the very beginning, the conversation had reached an awkward impasse. It was almost as if M. de Courcel had moved his King's pawn forward one square and Lord Kimberley had replied by moving his King's pawn forward one square, and that thereafter neither player felt at all certain what he ought to do next. In the embarrassing silence which followed, Lord Kimberley played out of turn. He said that the Khedive had been the source of much trouble. With the crisis of the previous year in mind, M. de Courcel was of course very painfully aware of this; but it was not a matter which he was anxious to discuss. He assured Lord Kimberley hurriedly that the French Government had no wish to stir up the Khedive against Great Britain, "whatever

unauthorized Frenchmen might do " ; and he sought to divert the conversation from the embarrassing details of recent happenings in Egypt by giving expression to a comprehensive and harmless generality. Why, he asked, should not France and England come to some understanding which would enable them to act together harmoniously in Egyptian affairs? Some day, at any rate he would like to return " more seriously " to the subject.

Though this exchange of views was for the time being barren of results, M. de Courcel was not discouraged, and early in the following year, when Lord Salisbury had replaced Lord Kimberley at the Foreign Office, he returned to the " more serious " consideration of the topic of which he had spoken. Lord Salisbury thought his remarks on this occasion " sufficiently curious " to cause him to submit them to Lord Cromer for his comments. In the course of the discussion M. de Courcel had made a good many admissions. He had admitted that an international Government in Egypt was " the worst expedient to which it was possible to resort." He had disclaimed any desire of renewing the condominium. He had denied, " with a great wealth of emphasis," that France wished to take our place in Egypt ; he had even doubted whether his Government wished us to leave, since the large investments which the French people held in Egypt would undoubtedly fall in value if we did so. And when Lord Salisbury had expressed the opinion that to leave Egypt to herself would be to leave her to anarchy, M. de Courcel had interjected, " You certainly must not do that." What, then, was it that M. de Courcel had to suggest? Very little, it seemed, in actual fact. The hostility of the French people was based in the main on sentiment ; could we not show greater consideration for their *amour propre*? Retain control of the Egyptian army, but withdraw the army of occupation ; appoint more Frenchmen to the various offices ; consult them and discuss matters with them before taking measures of importance

in the country. The Wolff Convention, he asserted, would have stood a much better chance of being accepted if we had consulted the French Government about it first.

It certainly seemed that there was a genuine desire on the part of some Frenchmen, at any rate, to find a basis of agreement; for Lord Salisbury received a message from M. Hanotaux about the same time, "through a private friend," to the effect that they wanted very little. Lord Salisbury was interested but a little sceptical. On the possibility of offering the French a greater number of appointments he could express no opinion. As to the withdrawal of the army of occupation, he was not sure that if we reserved a power of re-entry and maintained a garrison at Cyprus, something might not be done. So far as the question whether we should find it practicable to consult the French Government on Egyptian questions was concerned, the answer must depend on the reasonableness of the French Government themselves. And he added epigrammatically, if a little unkindly, "It would not be difficult if the French Government were composed of anything but Frenchmen."

Cromer was more sceptical still. He gave carefully considered reasons for his own belief that the personal authority of the English Consul-General on the spot, backed though it might be by moral support from London, would prove insufficient, in the absence of an English military force, to prevent "either an immediate collapse," or, as was, perhaps, more probable, "a gradual disintegration of the reformed Government in Egypt."

Then, as to prior consultation with the French, it must be remembered that, though the actual condominium was a thing of the past, the international system of government still flourished:

"We are, more's the pity, *obliged* to consult the French, and a round dozen of other Governments, on all matters of importance, with results that have

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“ been so disappointing that we now rarely bring  
“ forward any proposal which involves international  
“ agreement. In the exceptional cases – that is to say,  
“ when it is decided to address the Powers – we always  
“ wish to feel the French pulse first before going to the  
“ others ; but I cannot say that our efforts have so far  
“ been of a nature to encourage us to move further in  
“ this direction.”

With regard to the question of giving the French a larger share in the Administration, he was not prepared to say that it was impossible ; but he held very strongly that it would be the extreme of folly to make any concession in the matter of appointments without getting something definite in return :

“ What we want in Egypt is financial liberty. I mean  
“ by financial liberty that after the interest on the Debt  
“ has been paid, and an adequate sum – say, as at  
“ present, two millions – has been set aside to provide  
“ for the extremely improbable case of an insufficiency  
“ in the revenues pledged to the bondholders, the  
“ remainder of the revenues should be absolutely at  
“ the disposal of the Egyptian Treasury. The Com-  
“ missioners of the Debt should have no voice in the  
“ matter.”

If the French were prepared to treat on these lines, some arrangement might be possible. But unless they were willing to accept unconditionally the principle of financial liberty, he begged that no hope should be held out to them of administrative concessions in other directions.<sup>1</sup>

It cannot be said that there was much in the letter from which extracts have been given above to afford encouragement to M. de Courcel. He was not, nevertheless, to be deterred from pursuing the subject, and he took advantage of Cromer's presence in England in August 1896 to discuss the matter with him in person. The discussion led to no practical result, for the reason that, beyond stressing the French objection to an indefinite occupation of the

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Lord Cromer to Lord Salisbury, February 29th, 1896.

country by Great Britain, and suggesting the concentration of the British garrison at Alexandria, M. de Courcel had no concrete proposal to make. He could only ask in impotent despair if England and France were to be condemned to live permanently in a state of friction. Cromer hoped not, and that in time some opportunity might occur of settling their differences.

As will have been gathered, Cromer himself was essentially a man of action ; in the practical affairs of life words divorced from action meant little to him. And, truth to tell, French action tallied ill with the soft phrases of the French Ambassador in London. In the case of the construction of the Nile reservoirs, a purely non-political question, Cromer had adopted the procedure proposed by M. de Courcel. Since the consent of the Commissioners of the Debt was required he had, before taking any action, consulted confidentially the French authorities. Not a word, he told Lord Salisbury, had been said to anyone save to the French Commissioner and to the French Consul-General. They had both professed themselves favourable to the project, yet the oracle in Paris had remained dumb. And while M. de Courcel was pursuing the path of peace in London, what were the French doing in the hidden recesses of the African hinterland ? Lord Kimberley had struck a note of alarm so far back as 1894 and Cromer had promised watchfulness. " I will look out, if the French begin to move about Africa," he had replied on June the 2nd of that year. And in 1897 it was becoming daily clearer that French agents were bent on a forward policy in the neighbourhood of the upper reaches of the Nile. When the advance of the Egyptian expeditionary force beyond Dongola was still under discussion, Lord Salisbury had stated that there were many arguments against going forward, and had added :

" I only know one argument in its favour — the possibility that if we wait another year we may find  
" that the French have anticipated us by setting up

“ a French principality at Fashoda. . . . If ever we  
“ get to Fashoda, the diplomatic crisis will be some-  
“ thing to remember and the ‘ What next ? ’ will be  
“ a very interesting question.”<sup>1</sup>

In Egypt itself the two nations, instead of coming nearer to an understanding, seemed to be moving rapidly apart. The action of the French in challenging the right of the *Caisse* to release money for the purpose of financing an advance, to which reference has been made in Chapter XX., had elicited some caustic observations from the Chancellor of the Exchequer in London. This plain speaking had caused a considerable stir in Paris. M. de Courcel had asked Lord Salisbury why he wished to plunge France into revolution. Lord Salisbury had naturally repudiated any such intention, and M. de Courcel had thereupon informed him that Sir Michael Hicks-Beach’s speech had imperilled the position of both M. Faure and M. Hanotaux, and that a revolution might be the result. In Egypt the effect had been equally marked, and was reported by Cromer with no little satisfaction :

“ The Chancellor of the Exchequer’s speech was  
“ frank. . . . Here the effect was excellent. The  
“ general impression amongst the French colony was  
“ that war would be declared instantaneously. They  
“ now understand that it is to be delayed. The only  
“ remark, as I understand, the Russian Consul-General  
“ made was, ‘ Ils ’ (the French) ‘ l’ont bien mérité ! ’  
“ There is nothing like a candid friend to tell the  
“ truth.”<sup>2</sup>

Less than a year later he was pondering on the outcome of the clash which, equally with Lord Salisbury, he foresaw must sooner or later take place between French and British forces on the nebulous frontier of the Sudan.  
“ I presume that sooner or later we shall have to put

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Cromer, October 29th, 1897.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, February 18th, 1897.

up an Egyptian flag at Fashoda, and that we shall then pass into a stage of diplomatic bickering with the French.”<sup>1</sup>

The story of the dramatic meeting between General Kitchener and Captain Marchand at Fashoda in September of the same year is too well known to need re-telling. Cromer was chiefly concerned to direct such advantage as was to be reaped from the enforced retreat of the French from the position which they had sought to acquire on the Upper Nile, into the most profitable channel. His constant aim was to secure for the work of reform on which he was engaged in Egypt, relief from the shackles imposed upon it by the international system. Might not the situation which had arisen be made use of to that end? “Another idea of a wholly different description occurs to me,” he wrote when discussing with Lord Salisbury the frontiers of the newly conquered territory :

“Has not the time almost arrived when we might tell the French that the constant heckling which we have to endure from them in Egypt will no longer be tolerated? No one who has not been behind the scenes of the Egyptian Administration can realise fully the annoyance to which we are exposed. The various international institutions which exist here were originally created to prevent a bad Government moving in a vicious direction. They are now persistently used to prevent a civilized Government from moving in the direction of reform. The real justification for their existence has under the altered condition of affairs long since passed away. They are maintained for purposes of obstruction, and for nothing else. . . .

“To formulate precisely what I mean, could we not demand of the French (1) that they should let go their hold on the economies resulting from the Conversion of the Debt, which now amount to over £3,000,000; and (2) that the *Caisse de la Dette* should be confined to their proper functions – that is to say, that they should be mere receivers for the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, January 28th, 1898.

“bondholders, and that, when the interest of the Debt  
 “is once secured and an adequate sum – say £1,000,000  
 “– put aside to provide for emergencies, they should  
 “have nothing more to say to the administration of  
 “the finances? I do not say that the adoption of  
 “this measure would get rid of all our international  
 “top hamper. We should still have the Capitula-  
 “tions, the Mixed Tribunals, and the Railway Board,  
 “of which latter I hope some day to be quit. But  
 “it would be a step in the right direction. It would  
 “give us financial freedom of action, and this would  
 “be a great point gained.”

He thought that, if some such terms as these could be obtained, it would be worth while to make some territorial concessions to the French in the Bahr-el-Ghazal Province ; without them he would concede nothing.

“The moment for putting forward proposals of this  
 “nature seems opportune. There appears to be  
 “little doubt of the general drift of English public  
 “opinion. It may be that it is inclined to go rather  
 “far in the direction of insistence on British claims  
 “and views ; but, however this may be, it seems a  
 “pity not to utilize the favourable breeze in order  
 “to get the ship more or less into harbour. It seems  
 “also pretty certain that if it came to a question of  
 “war – although personally I disbelieve in the French  
 “fighting – we are stronger than they. Would it  
 “not be advisable to take advantage of such an ex-  
 “ceptionally favourable combination of affairs?  
 “Excuse my making these suggestions. They may  
 “be worth little, but I have thought that there would  
 “be no harm in laying my views before you.”<sup>1</sup>

The time, however, was not yet ripe for the comprehensive settlement with France which in due season was to influence so profoundly the whole course of European history. Some further preparation of the ground was necessary, and in this task Cromer played an honourable and an important part, as will be explained in the following chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, November 15th, 1898.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE GERMAN MENACE

WHEN M. de Courcel had broached the question of Anglo-French relations in 1896, Cromer had been interested but sceptical as to the possibility of any tangible result. He had had "a long and very friendly" talk with the French Ambassador in London in August; but, in spite of the spirit of goodwill displayed on both sides, the discussion had left matters very much where they were. The reason was obvious; Cromer wished to deal with the hard facts of the situation, whereas M. de Courcel was only prepared to talk in generalities. "He does not know his subject," Cromer reported to Lord Salisbury; "in order to come to close quarters, some knowledge of the more important detail is essential." The English, Cromer argued, could not withdraw the army of occupation, and it was no use, therefore, continuing the discussion except upon the assumption that that particular solution of the question was, for the time being at any rate, beyond the range of what was practicable. This being so, would it not be well to try to come to some understanding on which to base a satisfactory *modus vivendi* in Egypt itself? M. de Courcel urged in reply that the French mind naturally rejected an *état provisoire*, and craved for *une situation nette*. He invited Cromer, therefore, to abandon the provincial point of view and to soar into the higher regions of general European diplomacy. If once the question was treated *d'en haut*, and the larger issues settled, the details might be expected to settle themselves. The discussion wandered backwards and forwards between these two points of view, Cromer endeavouring to divert it into more practical channels, M. de Courcel heading it back

constantly into the less embarrassing sphere of general principles. "All this," Cromer told Lord Salisbury, "I thought very clever, French, and unpractical." And there, for the time being, the matter, so far as Cromer was concerned, was allowed to rest.

There is little doubt, however, that in spite of the difficulty of finding common ground when the concrete issues were faced, and in spite of the discouragement for which French action in the neighbourhood of the Sudan was responsible, Cromer turned his mind with growing interest to the possibility of effecting a radical change in the unhappy relations which, during the greater part of his public life, had existed between England and France. From the point of view of the task which Great Britain was endeavouring to discharge in Egypt, the advantage of a genuine understanding between the two countries was obvious enough. But there were other reasons for the determination with which, in the end, he threw the whole weight of his influence into the scale in favour of an understanding, not only with France, but with Russia also. In spite of his natural preference for concerning himself with concrete issues, he sometimes permitted himself to soar into those higher regions of European diplomacy which, during his conversation with M. de Courcel in 1896, he had shown so marked a disinclination to enter. And, as he cast his gaze beyond the confines of Egypt itself, he saw upon the horizon the signs of an approaching storm. Sooner, indeed, than most men he detected the direction in which the main currents of European history were setting; and as, from the last rungs of the ladder up which the nineteenth century had climbed, he looked over the edge towards the new century about to dawn, he pictured to himself a considerable shifting of the fulcrum on which, during his own lifetime, the balance of power in Europe had remained suspended.

A study of Cromer's attitude towards the larger problem of England's European policy at this time possesses a special interest. It shows him a clear-cut and an influential

figure at the head of one of two distinct schools of thought, one leaning towards a closer relationship with the Teutonic, the other with the Latin, peoples of the Continent. It shows, further, that the conclusions which led him to throw in his lot with the latter were the outcome of a careful consideration on his part of fundamental forces lying below the surface of day-to-day happenings deep down in the region of the subconscious, from which human action ultimately springs. It shows that he was quick to realize that in the heart of Europe a subtle and dangerous intellectual ferment was in progress which was tending to deflect a whole people in their outlook upon life, not merely from the pathway of a hitherto generally accepted standard of morality, but from the pathway even of sanity itself. It is only when this is understood that Cromer's attitude becomes intelligible. On a superficial view one might, indeed, have expected that he would have been found in the pro-German, rather than in the pro-Latin, school. Temperamentally he was himself much closer to the Teuton than to the Frank. From his ancestors there had come down to him many of the more admirable characteristics of their race, giving him his thoroughness and consequent efficiency, his solid strength and his unfailing capacity for forming calm judgments in the presence of emergencies. He was not, therefore, without a certain natural affinity with the German people; and he paid willing homage to the contributions made by the thinkers, the scholars, and the scientists of Germany towards the enrichment of the world's intellectual store. Moreover, in the political sphere French hostility in Egypt had driven him, temporarily, at any rate, during the earlier years of the occupation, into the arms of Germany. Berlin, and not Cairo, he had told Lord Rosebery in 1886, was the real centre of gravity of Egyptian affairs, and he had added that the point which he desired to press most urgently upon his attention was the necessity of working well with Germany.<sup>1</sup> And from that time

<sup>1</sup> See back, Chapter xi., p. 128.



onwards he had been almost incessantly fretted and thwarted in his work in Egypt by the representatives of France. The motive, then, which led him in face of constant discouragement to transfer his political affections from Germany, his political friend, to France, his political enemy, must have been a powerful one. It was one which will well repay investigation.

A reference back to Chapter IV will show that as a young man Cromer had made a careful study of the German military machine, and that with the knowledge which he had acquired he had successfully predicted, against the whole weight of military opinion in England, the rapid defeat of the French in 1870. But he had done much more than study the actual organization of the German army; his inquiring mind had ranged over a much wider field; and both then and subsequently he had made a thoughtful study of the teaching, in part military, in part historical, in part ethical, and in part philosophical, which was responsible for producing the particular type of mentality out of which emerged what he himself described as "that false code of civilization termed German *Kultur*."

The conclusions which he derived from his study were disturbing. For, as he pondered on the drift of the intellectual currents plainly apparent among the military academies and the universities of Prussia, he could not doubt that, whether by accident or by design, the leaders of thought whose teaching found most favour in popular estimation were giving form to a mass mentality of a type which sooner or later must prove a serious menace, not only to the peace of Europe, but to the very foundations on which the civilization of the West had been built up, and, in his view, must continue to rest. Clausewitz and Nietzsche in the sphere of philosophy and ethics – the former, in Cromer's estimation, much more than a strategist or a tactician; rather a political philosopher who might be said to have laid down a code dealing with the general principles upon which war should be conducted –

Niebuhr and Ranke, Mommsen and Sybel, and more particularly, perhaps, Treitschke, amongst historians ; Frederick the Great and Bismarck in the domain of statecraft ; Moltke, Julius von Hartmann, and Bernhardt amongst military writers – all these were responsible for propagating and popularizing a doctrine frankly subversive of the moral standard which, whether it were held to have originated in the porch of the Stoics or in the stable of Bethlehem, had, for nigh on two thousand years, been generally accepted alike by those who believed and those who discarded its divine origin as the basis of all civilized society.<sup>1</sup> With the dogma of religion Cromer troubled himself little ; with the ethics of Christianity it was different, for he recognized in the Christian moral code the only sure foundation on which human thought and action could safely base themselves – the guiding light without which civilization itself must come to shipwreck. “ What can Germans plead,” he asked at a later date, when the teaching which he had regarded with such loathing and apprehension was bearing its inevitable fruit, “ in answer to the charge that they are endeavouring to pervert the morals of the world ? ” That this menace to the peace and to the moral well-being of mankind was no figment of his own imagination he satisfied himself by a critical examination of the writings of the leading exponents of the political and moral creed of Prussian chauvinism.

Running through the works of Nietzsche he found a constant attempt to set against the altruism of Christianity as the ideal of human conduct a crude and sinister egotism. The whole of his “ fantastic philosophy ” rested upon “ the odious theory that *will to power* should be the sole guiding principle for the regulation of human conduct.” For himself, Cromer was frankly amazed that the nineteenth century of the Christian era could have produced “ so strange a moral and intellectual abortion ” as this crazy ethical iconoclast. It was known, of course, that towards the end of his life Nietzsche was avowedly

<sup>1</sup> See an article written by Cromer for the *Spectator* of August 28th, 1915.

insane, and for Cromer this fact went a long way towards explaining both Nietzsche and his philosophy. Yet in Germany his teaching exercised a widespread influence, and was undoubtedly a powerful contributory cause of that moral collapse which Cromer regarded as "one of the most extraordinary and also one of the most tragic events of modern times."

Of the historians whom Cromer held to a large extent responsible for the chauvinism of modern Germany, Niebuhr wrote entirely, and Ranke partially, before the full tide of absolutism had set in. Cromer himself placed the turning-point of modern German history in 1849, when the Frankfort Parliament miscarried. It was this event, he reminds us, that moved Moltke to exclaim that "the time of heroes was coming after that of brawlers and scribblers." Mommsen and Sybel followed Niebuhr and Ranke; but neither attained to the same eminence as Treitschke as exponents of the gospel that might is right; nor had any previous historian enjoyed a similar success in securing the general acceptance of his countrymen for his preaching. "Treitschke," Cromer wrote in after years, "used all the resources of a powerful intellect and of a ready wit, which, though unusual in a German, was characteristically national inasmuch as it was wholly wanting in refinement, to inflame still further the combustible passions of those whom he addressed, and to quicken into action that wholly unreasonable tendency to quarrel which, in defiance both of right and reason, he regarded as a national asset."<sup>1</sup> That many of the arguments by which the historians sought to support the doctrine which they preached rested upon fallacious premises was amply apparent to anyone not blinded by national prejudice. To expose fully the fallacies of their arguments would, Cromer declared, require a whole volume. He laid special stress upon one—the argument which

<sup>1</sup> See an article entitled "The German Historians," first published in the *Spectator*, August 28th, 1915.

he described as "misapplied Darwinism." The predominance of the strong over the weak, it was argued, was "an indisputable law of life." The validity of this theory, Cromer held, could only be admitted if human beings were in all respects to be assimilated to the brute creation. It involved a complete confusion between a "law of Nature" and a "law of life." Animals, birds, and insects devoured each other because they were obliged to do so in order to live, and because they were not restrained from doing so by any moral or intellectual scruples. This was the "law of Nature." But the "law of life," to which Treitschke and his fellow-apostles appealed, had not been ordained by Nature. It had been made by men, and, moreover, by bad men. In so far as it existed it ought to be repealed. It assumed, not only that the Germans could not prosper without the extinction of Belgians, Dutch, Danes, and others, but also that the survival of the Teuton and the annihilation of all other presumably inferior races was a necessity dictated in the general interests of civilization. To anyone but a Teuton, possibly, any such assumption was palpably absurd.<sup>1</sup>

It was natural enough that to Cromer, with his markedly humanitarian leanings, the doctrine of "absolute" war formulated by Clausewitz and developed by his successors, involving as it did the exaltation of cruelty, should have seemed to be one of the most noxious by-products of German *Kultur*. When Nietzsche had dwelt on the sense of satisfaction to be derived from the infliction of cruelty, Cromer had discounted his writings on the ground that they came perilously near to the ravings of a homicidal maniac. In the case of Clausewitz and his followers no such excuse existed. They taught with a perfectly clear and coldly calculated end in view. They well understood the psychology of the race to which they themselves belonged, and to which their teaching was addressed; and, in accordance

<sup>1</sup> See "The German Historians."

with the tendencies of the German mind, they clothed their advocacy of cruelty with an idealistic garment. War was in itself "part of the universal order of things instituted by God,"<sup>1</sup> and the purpose for which it existed, namely, the ennobling of the human race through suffering, should not be endangered by any illogical attempt to civilize it. War was intended to be brutal, and the more brutal it was, therefore, the better would it serve the purpose for which it existed. Cromer was probably right in supposing that when, in 1914, war of the kind which the Germans had long been contemplating at last came, the theory and practice of "frightfulness" came as sudden revelations to a bewildered and horror-stricken world. He was undoubtedly right in assuming that there would have been less surprise if the public of Great Britain and other civilized countries had been more familiar with German literature, and had followed with a greater degree of attention the development of German thought. As a careful student of these things himself, he asserted that from Clausewitz onwards "an ever-ascending scale of ruthless brutality" had characterized the utterances of responsible German authorities in their declarations as to the manner in which war should be conducted.<sup>2</sup>

Cromer was himself one of a small minority who had realized betimes the extent to which Germany had in thought cut herself off from the community of civilized nations; and it was because he had done so that during the opening years of the twentieth century he sought with steadily increasing anxiety a basis for agreement with France. The opportunity for which he was hoping came during the summer of 1903.

<sup>1</sup> Moltke, quoted by Cromer in an article first published in the *National Review* of November 1915.

<sup>2</sup> See *German Military Ethics*.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE ANGLO-FRENCH AGREEMENT

IN the summer of 1903, Lord Lansdowne, now Foreign Secretary in Mr. Balfour's Government, had a conversation of considerable importance with M. Delcassé. In the course of it he had ascertained that the French Government were above all things anxious to secure for their country a position of assured predominance in Morocco. Recognition of French interests in that country by Great Britain was an essential step on the road which France desired to travel, and M. Delcassé had made it clear that it would be in no niggling spirit that he and his colleagues would be prepared to discuss the value of the commodity for which they were in the market. Here was an opening which appealed with very special force to Cromer.

These pages have been written in vain if they have not made it clear that this distinguished representative of a family famous for its eminence in the world of finance possessed above all things a financier's mind. He assessed values instinctively; in any situation in which they existed he detected unerringly the elements of a bargain. So here. "In Morocco, Siam, and Sokoto," he wrote, "the French want various things which we have it in our power to give, in Newfoundland and Egypt the situation is reversed. In these latter cases we depend to a greater extent on the goodwill of France."<sup>1</sup> He did not imagine that there would be any great difficulty in coming to terms over Siam, Sokoto, and Newfoundland; the main questions were Egypt and Morocco. He had already suggested that Sir Eldon Gorst should proceed to Paris in the autumn of

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Lansdowne, July 17th, 1903.

1903 with a view to sounding the French as to their attitude in respect to the conversion of the Egyptian Debt and the abolition of the *Caisse*. He now realized that the French Government would be likely to turn a deaf ear to all suggestions, unless they were coupled with proposals calculated to meet their views about Morocco. He still ventured to suggest, therefore, that Sir Eldon Gorst should proceed to Paris, but that before he did so His Majesty's Government should come to some decision as to the general lines of their policy in respect to North Africa. In all diplomatic negotiations there was always a danger of moving either too fast or too slow. In the present case, possibly, the danger lay rather on the side of moving too slowly :

“ Personally, I should be inclined not to delay too long, but to take advantage of the present phase of Anglo-French tendencies and relations. It is conceivable that it may not last. . . . It seems to me that the first point which has to be decided is whether or not any radical objection in principle exists as regards acquiescence in the French view of the Morocco question. Supposing this question to be answered in the sense which commends itself to me, the counter-concessions which we should demand in Egypt will require very careful consideration. I will at present only say that I think that they should be of a substantial nature. I rather doubt whether mere acquiescence in the financial proposals recently under discussion would suffice. I should be inclined, in the first instance at all events, to negotiate on the basis of an explicit, or in any case implicit, recognition by the French that Egypt falls within our sphere of influence, as Morocco would fall within theirs.”<sup>1</sup>

It so happened that at this time the normally placid ocean of home politics was visited by one of those periodic storms to which experience shows it to be subject. For the first time for at least a generation, a leading

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Lansdowne, July 17th, 1903.

statesman was challenging that economic doctrine which, since the repeal of the Corn Laws by Sir Robert Peel, had stood for economic orthodoxy in Great Britain. Protection was the one doctrine which to Cromer was anathema ; Free Trade the one subject on which he was frankly, even aggressively, dogmatic. " I know that some people's minds work in that way," he once remarked to a friend who was putting the arguments for a modification of the too rigid application of the theories of the Manchester school ; and, having thus disposed of the question, he turned to other matters. " Mere waste of wind between us to exchange words on that class of topics," as Carlyle once remarked. In 1903, however, he was less concerned with the merits of the question itself than impatient with those statesmen in England who were wasting their time and their energies in the pursuit of a barren controversy when matters of real, indeed of vital, importance were demanding their attention. " To those of my age," he wrote about this time, " it is, indeed, rather tiresome to be under the necessity of furbishing up their old and perhaps rather rusty economic armour in a cause which, they had every reason to believe, had, at all events in England, been fought and definitely won half a century ago."<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister was, in fact, occupying himself with the composition of his " Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade " — the most delightful treatise, surely, in so brief a compass ever written on so arid a subject ; and Cromer had some justification for his fear that, amid the wordy preoccupations which the situation in England imposed upon her leading statesmen, other matters might be a little lost sight of. In the autumn, therefore, he determined to make himself heard. " This enclosure explains itself," he told Lord Lansdowne. " The course I have adopted is unusual. If you think it is open to any objection, pray throw the letter into the fire. In the contrary case, I would ask you kindly to forward it to

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. St. Loe Strachey.



the Prime Minister." The enclosure to which Cromer here referred was a letter which he had penned to Mr. Balfour. The letter is of particular interest because, apart altogether from the importance which it shows that Cromer attached to an agreement with France in Egypt, it contains, stated with an admirable economy of words, the basic principle on which at all times and in all circumstances Cromer's statecraft rested – a sound administration of finance.

"I had hoped to see you in London. . . . I had wished to press on your attention the very great importance of the present negotiations with France. I so much fear that, amidst the clash and din of the fiscal war, the full bearing of this grave issue may not be adequately recognized. This must be my apology for writing.

"The question is not merely one of settling our Egyptian difficulties, though that in itself would be a most desirable consummation. It extends to a far wider sphere. It is, I am aware, dangerous to be anything of a visionary in diplomacy. Possibly, I may, like Agamemnon in the Iliad, dream dreams of things never destined to be accomplished; but I cannot help regarding an understanding upon all pending questions with France as possibly a stepping-stone to a general understanding with Russia, and that this, possibly, again may prepare the ground for some reduction in our enormous military and naval expenditure. To my mind, our two greatest national dangers at present are backwardness in education and unsound finance, by which latter term I mean more specifically spending more money than we can afford. I cannot help indulging in a hope that the French negotiations, if brought to a successful termination, may open the way to a better order of things, without in any way endangering all that is essential in the policy of modern Imperialism."<sup>1</sup>

And to Lord Lansdowne himself he wrote a few days later, "Now that you have been so successful with the Tay

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated Cairo, October 15th, 1903.

salmon, I hope you will succeed in getting a large-sized diplomatic Jock Scott into Cambon. I shall not be happy till I see him gaffed and lying on the bank."

Lord Lansdowne needed no spur to urge him on ; he pursued the matter with that almost excessive courtesy of manner, a legacy from his own French ancestry, which was apt to leave those who judged too hastily by appearances only, wondering and a little taken aback when suddenly they felt the tempered steel that lay below. In face of the intensity of his own anxiety for success, he was a little disappointed with the first response from France. Not so Lord Cromer, who thought the progress made distinctly hopeful. He was not at all discouraged by the French reply, he told Lord Lansdowne ; and he summed up as follows the position which, as he understood it, had now been reached :

1. The settlement of the Siamese question.
2. The neutralization of what appeared to be a sufficient portion of the coast of Morocco.
3. The recognition of the British occupation of Egypt.
4. The cession of the conversion economies in Egypt.
5. The recognition of the principle that both the system of financial control and the régime of the Capitulations in Egypt were to undergo modification.

Certainly this was not enough ; but who would have imagined, only a short time before, that in so brief a period they would have got so far ? Cromer was clearly more than pleased :

" I most earnestly hope, not merely on Egyptian, but on more general grounds, that you will continue the negotiations vigorously," he wrote on November 1st. " Such an opportunity as the present is not likely to recur. We must manage to come to terms. . . . Personally I regard this as by far the most important diplomatic affair that we have had in hand for a long time past. We cannot, of course, expect to get all that we want ; but, even allowing a fair margin

“for cargo we may have to throw overboard before  
“we get into port, there is ample room for a notable  
“and very beneficial achievement.”<sup>1</sup>

For the reasons given in the previous chapter, Cromer had, in fact, made up his mind that an agreement with France, and if possible with Russia, was not merely desirable, but a vital necessity in the then condition of the world. He did not underestimate the difficulties which stood in the way of any satisfactory understanding being arrived at between Great Britain and Russia ; but he took the view that these difficulties must be faced, and if possible overcome, since he suspected that the hope of an Anglo-Russian understanding was a powerful influence affecting the recent conciliatory attitude of the French Government towards Great Britain. “Since I have been at this sort of work – now some twenty years,” he wrote, “I do not think I ever remember such an opportunity as the present.”<sup>1</sup> And he set to work to do all that lay in his power to smooth the road which the diplomatists of both countries had to travel. No detail was too small to be of importance in this task. Familiar with the value which French public opinion attached to what the more phlegmatic Briton was disposed to discount as mere sentiment, he sought to obliterate rankling memories of Fashoda by expunging its name from the map, and giving to the site its native name of Kodoc, by which it has since been known. “I am glad you have rechristened Fashoda,” Lord Lansdowne wrote. “It was a happy inspiration, and, if the newspapers don’t find it out, I shall contrive some means of making them do so – our French friends will certainly be pleased.” He foresaw the difficulty which the negotiators would be likely to experience when they came to detail, particularly in connection with the Egyptian part of the business ; and he was ready with a proposal for meeting it. “There are not more than three or four people in existence,” he told Lord Lansdowne,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Lansdowne.

"who can find their way through the Egyptian administrative jungle. To be tripped up on what might primarily appear a point of detail might lead to very serious consequences. I, therefore, strongly recommend that, when once you have got the main features of the arrangement staked out, you should let me send Gorst home. He knows the whole thing thoroughly."<sup>1</sup>

Cromer was satisfied that the French were at least as anxious as the British to come to terms, and he did not underestimate the value of this knowledge as a pawn to be used in the negotiations; the fact, therefore, that even so he was willing to concede a great deal, is proof of the supreme importance which he attached to their success. "I dare say we may have to throw some cargo overboard. . . ." Among the proposals made as a means of getting rid of external financial control was one for a further conversion of the Egyptian debt. Cromer had favoured the idea until reflection had suggested to him that the proposal was one which would be likely to excite opposition.

"Unless I am much mistaken," he told Lord Lansdowne, "when the financial side comes to be heard, there will be a loud outcry against conversion. I cannot conceive a French, or, indeed, any other bondholder, receiving £100 for a bond which is now worth £105, without uttering some very piercing shrieks. The conclusion I think to be drawn is that, unless the French ask for some assurance on this point, we may, perhaps, wisely leave it alone for the moment, and devote ourselves to other matters which make more pointedly towards a settlement."

There was, of course, the possible attitude of other Powers to be taken into account. In his conversations with the French representative in Egypt, Cromer had touched on the possible opposition of Germany. He now drew Lord Lansdowne's attention to the same point.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Lansdowne, November 1st, 1903.

"I wish to draw your very special attention to this point, as it is one of great importance," he wrote on November the 6th, 1903. "We cannot withdraw merely by reason of German opposition. *Ergo*, I say that, before we yield anything to the French in other directions, we should have a very clear understanding with them that, if we brush German opposition aside, they must not object. This attitude may conceivably lead us rather a long way, but, if once our position with the French was clear, I should not mind that."

By the middle of November matters had advanced sufficiently to justify Cromer in sending Sir Eldon Gorst to London to carry on the negotiations in detail. "He knows all my views," he told Lord Lansdowne. "I do not think that there is any point on which he and I disagree."

Sir Eldon Gorst was, indeed, fully aware of the immense importance which Cromer attached to securing an agreement, and he was a little alarmed at the somewhat rigid attitude on certain points which the Home Government seemed inclined to take up. As a first formal move in the matter Lord Lansdowne had, on November the 19th, embodied his suggestions in a letter to M. Cambon, the French Ambassador in London. There had followed a period during which no word was heard from the Quai d'Orsay, and it was not until December the 11th that Sir Eldon Gorst was able to report that the French had at last made a sign of life, and that in the course of a conversation between M. Cambon and Lord Lansdowne little difficulty had arisen so far as the affairs of Egypt were concerned. He added, however, that he was afraid that the Government were "inclined to be stiff" about some of the other points.

Cromer was not dissatisfied with the tone of the French reply, and he urged that Gorst should be sent to Paris without delay to discuss matters in detail. In London the wheels revolved less rapidly than Cromer in Cairo

could have wished. Gorst himself reported that Lord Lansdowne was unwilling that he should proceed to Paris until things were further advanced, and repeated on his own account, the comment which he had previously made: "I think the Government are inclined to be too stiff as regards minor points, and they will not hear of the cession of Gambia."

The delay, it appeared, had been due to a misunderstanding; for, while Lord Lansdowne was awaiting an official reply from the French Government to his letter of November the 19th, M. Delcassé was expecting a Memorandum from the British Foreign Secretary on the guarantees to be provided for the bondholders. This misunderstanding once cleared up, matters moved with greater rapidity. "At last I am off to Paris," Gorst wrote on Christmas Eve, "and hope to be able to make things go rather quicker than has hitherto been the case." And on January the 1st, 1904, "I had a most satisfactory interview with Delcassé yesterday. He was exceedingly cordial, and alluded several times to his great desire to bring the present negotiations to a successful issue." The other points, however, about which Gorst had reported that the Government were inclined to be stiff, were still a source of trouble. On January the 5th, Lord Lansdowne informed Cromer that the French had, unluckily, at the eleventh hour, put forward a quite unreasonable demand for the cession of an extensive tract of country on the right bank of the river Niger, as compensation for the concessions they were prepared to make in Newfoundland. Since their rights on the Treaty Shore were of no present, and of little prospective, value, Lord Lansdowne not unnaturally thought that it would be impossible to defend paying for them first by the compensation of private interests and then by a national compensation of the sort proposed. The matter was presented to him from a somewhat different angle by Gorst.

"The one question that now blocks the way," Gorst wrote on January the 6th, "is Newfoundland. The French have made a further proposal which Lord Lansdowne has declared to be unacceptable, and further negotiations are hung up until a settlement is reached on this point. It would be a real calamity if the whole business broke down on this account, but I hope that matters have gone so far that the two Governments must come to terms. The spirit in which our Government and the Foreign Office are negotiating is much too stiff. . . ."

Lord Cromer thought that the time had come when he might with advantage put in a word in support of the view which Gorst, on his instructions, was consistently urging in London :

"About the French negotiations I find myself, strangely enough, occupying rather the position of *l'avocat du diable*. The Convention drafted by Gorst merely embodies points to which the French have already agreed. When one sees them altogether, it is impossible not to be struck by the absolute and complete surrender of the French so far as Egypt is concerned."

He doubted if the French colony in Cairo had the faintest idea of what was impending ; and he was a little afraid that when the facts became known they might produce an explosion of French public opinion which might lead to the fall of M. Delcassé. In these circumstances he hoped that an understanding might be reached without undue delay on the non-Egyptian part of the business :

"It would be little short of a public calamity if the negotiations broke down now. Apart from the purely Egyptian aspects of the affair, it is clear that, in the present condition of Europe, a settlement of outstanding difficulties with France would be of the utmost value to us, and also to them."<sup>1</sup>

Not the least difficult and laborious part of the negotiations consisted in putting into writing the conclusions

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Lansdowne, January 15th, 1904.

reached in the course of the discussions ; and as January passed and February drew towards a close Lord Cromer became anxious. "I still think, if we are to come to terms, you will have to slack off a little," he wrote on the 26th of the month. "Surely we might give them the De Los Island without doing ourselves much harm. It will be a thousand pities, on every ground, if the negotiations break down."<sup>1</sup>

At last on March the 14th Lord Lansdowne was able to report real progress :

"The French negotiations, after sticking in all sorts of ignoble ruts, suddenly began to travel at the rate of an express train. I attribute Delcassé's desire to get on quickly partly to doubts as to the stability of his own Government, and partly to similar suspicions of the stability of ours. . . . We have now virtually settled all the points. . . . Gorst went to Paris on Sunday with drafts dealing with the whole case, and I have great hopes that his adroitness, aided by Delcassé's impatience, may enable him to come to terms all along the line. . . ."

This was highly satisfactory ; but at the last moment the negotiations, now practically complete, were nearly brought to naught by the objection taken by the French to acknowledging, in a formal diplomatic instrument, the right of Great Britain to remain indefinitely in Egypt. The difficulty of finding a formula acceptable to both parties was great. Gorst himself was doubtful how Cromer, viewing the matter from the local British standpoint, would receive the wording to which he had accorded a provisional approval. "The phrase about the occupation," he wrote on April the 1st, by way of comment on the draft Agreement of which he had despatched a copy to Cairo, "seems to me to give practically what we want without putting the dots on the i's too conspicuously. Throughout these negotiations I have endeavoured to secure the substance of what we desire,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Lansdowne.



while being easy with the French in the matter of form. . . .” His hope that Cromer might regard any wording on this point to which the French were willing to agree, if not as wholly satisfactory, at least as sufficiently so for all practical purposes, was not strengthened by a telegram which now came in from Paris. M. Delcassé, it appeared, objected very strongly to the phrase as to not fixing a limit of time for the occupation, and demanded its omission if he in his turn agreed to certain of the British demands in connection with Newfoundland.

Here was an awkward fence to be surmounted. Lord Lansdowne was in the country until the middle of the week, and a great responsibility rested on Gorst’s shoulders. Could he, in face of M. Delcassé’s telegram, secure the adhesion of the French to the phrasing of the provisional British draft? He would do his best; but, supposing that he failed – “Would you,” he asked in a letter explaining the situation to Lord Cromer, “have the whole negotiations break down on this account?” Finally he hoped that, when all the circumstances were taken into consideration, Cromer would feel satisfied that the Arrangement would not be a bad one either for England or for Egypt.

“In these matters one has to take what one can get;  
“and do not forget how often you have impressed  
“upon me the vanishing character of our Morocco  
“asset, and the consequent need of selling it as quickly  
“as possible. Moreover, I have left out the most  
“important argument of all – namely, the desirability  
“of a *rapprochement* between England and France.”

With his knowledge of Cromer’s views on the question, this last was the trump card to which he looked to take the trick.

Cromer had not forgotten any of these matters; but, with his genius for penetrating to the heart of a question, seizing hold of the essential and brushing aside the non-essential, he realized that unless the position of Great

Britain in Egypt was to be sacrificed altogether, this was the one point on which the English Government must stand firm. The accommodating attitude which he had so far displayed accordingly now slipped like a cloak from his shoulders. His figure stiffened, he spoke quietly, as he always did when dealing with vital issues, but in a manner which conveyed to those who knew him a sense of finality, which it was mere waste of words to question. In the early days of the occupation Mr. Gladstone's Government had said publicly and very distinctly that the occupation was a purely temporary expedient; that, so soon as the circumstances which had rendered it imperative disappeared, the troops would be withdrawn. The circumstances which had caused Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues to sanction the occupation had long since passed. Other circumstances had arisen which had rendered the redemption of the pledges, if not impossible, at least highly inconvenient. Cromer himself had realized this much earlier than had successive Governments in England, and had never ceased pressing his view upon successive Foreign Secretaries. Though with the lapse of time his view had come to be tacitly accepted, no steps had actually been taken to regularize the position. We were, consequently, very much in the position of "political pirates." Now that a definite opportunity of doing so had arisen, Cromer wished to remove this taint. He was, moreover, determined "to render it impossible for the French at any future time to summon us to withdraw." When, therefore, Sir Eldon Gorst asked him if on this point he would have the whole negotiations break down, his reply was immediate and uncompromising. "You ask whether I would break off the negotiations on this point? Yes, I would. That is to say, I would not, of course, break off on a mere matter of words, but I would do so unless we can get something from the French which will virtually release us from any obligation to withdraw in accordance with our former pledges." With regard to the

form of the Agreement on this point, why not invert the matter, and, instead of asking the French to make a declaration themselves, since they objected to doing so, ask them to take note of a declaration by the British?

In the meantime, an accommodation had been reached, and an Agreement signed, on the very day on which the above letter was written. The British Government declared that they had no intention of altering the political status of Egypt, while the French Government, for their part, declared that they would not obstruct the action of Great Britain in Egypt by asking that a limit of time should be fixed for the British occupation, or in any other manner.

Cromer had secured his main point; the British occupation was recognized; and Great Britain and France were friends at last. The opportunity of which he had "so earnestly hoped" advantage would be taken had been turned to good account; the way to "a better order of things" had been opened out; a stepping-stone to a general understanding with Russia had been definitely reached. That the negotiations with Russia would be far more difficult than those with the French, Cromer well knew; but he urged nevertheless that the attempt should be made. The omens were not wholly unpropitious. When, some years before, Lord Salisbury had thrown a fly over them, they had not looked at it; their attitude was much more encouraging to-day. Lord Lansdowne was willing but not very hopeful. The Russian position, he told Cromer in reply to his exhortation, was "very obscure." He had had conversations with Count Benckendorff, and had gained the impression that the Russian Government were not altogether indisposed to consider the bases of a "live-and-let-live understanding." But they had been upset by: "(1) Tibet; (2) George Curzon's splashings in the Persian puddle, and no doubt by (3) our purchase of the Chilian ironclads." Cromer could only urge perseverance. "If you can only come to terms over Persia, a

general understanding should not, I think, be impossible." A good deal of water was, however, to flow down the Nile before Lord Lansdowne's successor, Sir Edward Grey, was able to sign an Anglo-Russian Agreement, and so, on the eve of Cromer's own retirement from service to the State, place the coping-stone on the edifice for the erection of which he had striven so hard.

CHAPTER XXV  
YOUNG EGYPT

THE effect of the death of Lady Cromer, not on Lord Cromer only, but on the whole of the Agency staff, had been profound. A gracious and much-loved presence had been taken from their midst ; it was as if a shadow had fallen where the sparkle of vivid sunlight had hitherto played. Yet it was only those who were closest to him, perhaps, who could appreciate the full force of the blow that Cromer had sustained. Against any outward display of grief he set an iron will ; and from the depths of the domestic happiness which had been his he drew the strength which enabled him to turn a cheerful countenance to the world around him. From the presence of his sons, Rowland, destined to succeed him in due course as second Earl of Cromer, and his brother Windham, he derived, indeed, a great and abiding solace ; and when Nina, daughter of his brother Walter, afterwards Countess Granville, hurried out to Cairo to his aid, the bitterness of his leisure hours was softened by the subtle influence that only a woman knows how to shed around her. For those with eyes to see there was provided at the Agency at Cairo during these days a striking example of the bonds which English family life at its highest and best is capable of weaving.

Yet, for all his courage and the bravery of his outward showing, it is easy to understand the magnitude of the shock to his inner life which Cromer had received. " I just hear of Lady Grenfell's death," he wrote in June 1899. " Poor Francis. I hope he will stick to his work, though he will find it a hard struggle, particularly at first." He had been through the same hard struggle himself. Incessant work had in time dulled the sharp edge of pain ;

but it had been powerless to banish the sense of loneliness which left him desolate when the day's work was finally done. "I shall miss also that blessed Francis," he wrote in April 1900, "whose presence was a ray of sunshine in my solitary and joyless life."<sup>1</sup>

It is, perhaps, only those who have enjoyed, and have then lost, the intimate companionship of an idyllic marriage, who have known what it really means to drink the cup of solitude to its bitter dregs. Under the influence of time and work the most poignant memories may lose their sharpness; but the aching void remains. This had been Cromer's own experience when there crossed his path one who was to prove capable of lightening the heavy burden which he bore. For in 1901 there flashed once more into his world the light of beauty; and, at the unheralded approach of a new and altogether unexpected gladness, the shadows which were darkening his days lifted. In October 1901, Cromer and Katherine Thynne, second daughter of the 4th Marquess of Bath, were quietly married in London.

Armed now with a companionship which robbed retirement of its terrors, Cromer's mind turned from time to time to the contemplation of a future in England which would afford him leisure for those literary pursuits which, outside his work, were still his absorbing hobby. In the hot and brooding nights of the Egyptian summer, when all who were at liberty to do so had fled to cooler climes, Cromer and Harry Boyle might often have been seen seated after dinner on the verandah of the Agency in Cairo, reading aloud alternately passages from the *Iliad*. And such leisure as the exigencies of his task permitted was often whiled away in study of the classics and in the composition of the work subsequently published under the title of *Modern Egypt*. It was astonishing what pleasure he derived, in the midst of labours which would have taxed most men to the utmost, from this and similar pursuits. "And now do not think me quite

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Sir J. Rennell Rodd.

mad," he wrote in September 1902. "I have from time to time amused myself by putting some of the anthology epigrams into doggerel verse, not to be dignified by the name of poetry. I have had them printed for private circulation only. . . ." And again in December of the same year: "I am full of work, and can write no more. . . . Love to the children. I am translating Theocritus."<sup>1</sup>

But, strong man though he was physically, as in all other respects, the strain imposed by unremitting toil in a climate which during a part of the year was unusually severe, at last began to tell. "I am now about sixty-four years old," he reminded Lord Lansdowne in the spring of 1905. There seemed no reason why, in the ordinary course of events, he should not remain in Egypt for another six years. That was what in 1905 he purposed doing. In any case, he would not accept any other post; if he left Egypt he would retire from service altogether. But there was just that disturbing doubt about his health. With the work of the Sudan added to that of Egypt, the strain was increasing rather than diminishing. During the winter months work was carried on at high pressure. The tension lessened with the approach of summer; but in such a climate recuperation was impossible. Doubt as to his ability to bear the burden preyed on his mind. He took medical advice. The doctors were so far reassuring in that they were able to give him a technically clean bill of health. But they were not wholly reassuring.

"I have consulted numerous doctors," he wrote on April the 30th, 1905; "they all tell the same story – "that is to say, that there is nothing organically wrong with me, and that with care I may perfectly well go on for some years. But they all say that I am, so to speak, living on my capital, and that I cannot stand for long the sort of work I have to undertake for nine months a year in this climate. I should not attach so

<sup>1</sup> They were subsequently published.

\* Letters to Sir J. Rennell Rodd.

"much importance to what they say if I did not myself feel that they were right."<sup>1</sup>

Some concession was made to him in the matter of leave, whereby the period of his residence in Egypt during the summer was curtailed. But his forebodings were well founded, and early in 1907 he made up his mind that he must retire. "It costs me a pang to give up my work," he wrote in April of that year; "but I have no doubt I have done the right thing. I have not got the health and strength to carry it on properly, and if I cannot do it properly I would rather not do it at all."<sup>2</sup> And when pressed by King Edward, who held the highest opinion of his work in Egypt, to remain at his post for yet a little while longer, he replied in substance in much the same terms as those used by Grinnus, King of Thera, when he was told by the Pythoness to found a city in Libya: "I am too old, O King, and too inactive; so bid thou one of the younger men here to do these things."

An indication of the extent of the material regeneration which had been effected in Egypt before he finally bade farewell to the scene of his life's labours has been given in Chapter XII. With the conclusion of the Anglo-French Convention in 1904, another of the objects which he had steadily kept in view was brought within appreciable distance of accomplishment, since under it many of the modifications in the international arrangements established in Egypt for the protection of the foreign bondholders, for which he had never ceased to press, were actually effected. Under the Khedivial Decree annexed to the Declaration on the subject of Egypt, made by the Governments of Great Britain and France, the Egyptian Government acquired a free hand in the disposal of its own resources, so long, at any rate, as the punctual payment of interest on the Debt was assured. The *Caisse de la Dette* remained, but its functions were now strictly limited to receiving certain assigned revenues on behalf

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Lansdowne.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Sir J. Rennell Rodd.



of the bondholders. The right which it had so long claimed, and effectually exercised, of interfering in the general administration of the country, now ceased. The substitution of the land tax for the customs duties and railway receipts as "assigned revenue," which formed part of the new arrangement, was a stroke of genius worthy of Cromer's financial and administrative shrewdness, since while on the one hand it gave the bondholders admirable security, it freed the Egyptian Government on the other hand from irksome outside interference in important branches of the administration.

Not least amongst the causes of annoyance to Cromer in his administration of the finances of the country had been the restriction imposed upon the Egyptian Government in the matter of the reserves, which had been built up out of the economies resulting from the conversion scheme of 1890. These had been retained under the control of the *Caisse*, in whose coffers they had accumulated steadily but unproductively until, by the year 1904, they had reached a sum of £5,500,000. Under the Agreement of that year the *Caisse* lost the power of playing the part of the unprofitable servant and burying their talent in the ground. Thenceforth the right of the Egyptian Government to employ the fund on schemes designed to further the welfare of the Egyptian people was formally recognized.

Two other restrictions upon the freedom of the Egyptian Government, which had proved a source of constant embarrassment to Lord Cromer, were simultaneously swept away. The consent of the *Caisse*, hitherto required before the Egyptian Government could raise fresh loans, was declared to be no longer necessary; and the limit to the amount spent annually by the Egyptian Government on administration, which had been laid down by the London Convention of 1885, was removed. Thus in the sphere of finance the Egyptian Government might at last be said to be masters in their own house. A dream which Cromer had long dreamed had been realized. And, with

the abolition of outside financial control, the sting of Internationalism had, from his point of view, been drawn.

Certain other aspects of Internationalism, however, remained. The system which had grown up in Egypt under the Capitulations, comprising the jurisdiction of the Consular Courts and the Mixed Tribunals, continued in operation. It did so because Lord Cromer was of opinion that the time had not yet come for any organic change in this direction. In these circumstances His Majesty's Government had not, as Lord Lansdowne observed in his despatch to Sir E. Monson, the British Ambassador in Paris, taken advantage of the changes which were being effected to propose any alterations in this respect. Lord Lansdowne had, however, added that whenever Egypt was ready for the introduction of a legislative and judicial system "similar to that which exists in other civilized countries," they had sufficient grounds for counting on French co-operation in effecting the necessary changes.

Lord Cromer had inveighed so often against the system in force under the Capitulations, that his objection to its abolition may appear at first sight to require explanation. The reason for his attitude is, in reality, not far to seek. If the existing system was to go, what was to be set up in its place? Obviously the legislative and judicial system similar to that which existed in other civilized countries, to which Lord Lansdowne had referred in his despatch to the British Ambassador in Paris. But what was meant exactly by a legislative and judicial system similar to that which existed in other civilized countries? If it meant the establishment in Egypt of anything of the nature of Parliamentary Government, which Cromer understood to be the programme of those who claimed to voice the aspirations of Egyptian nationalism, the idea could only be described in his opinion as "absurd." In his view the programme of the National Party was, for the time being at any rate, quite incapable of realization. He doubted,

indeed, whether, in the form in which it was then conceived, it could ever be realized.<sup>1</sup>

Upon the question of the suitability or otherwise of a Parliamentary form of Government for Eastern peoples, Cromer held very definite views. No better illustration of the shrewd common sense of his outlook upon the political problems of the day could, indeed, be wanted, than that provided by his attitude towards this question. In all the practical affairs of life Cromer was essentially a realist who rode his imagination on a tight rein. When it was suggested to him that a statesman who was incapable of conceiving and attempting to realize an ideal was a mere empiricist, he retorted that, if this same statesman, in pursuit of his ideal, neglected all his facts and allowed himself to become an inhabitant of a political Cloud Cuckooland, he would certainly ruin his own reputation, and might not improbably inflict very great injury upon the country and people which formed the subject of his crude experiments.<sup>2</sup> Cromer himself never neglected any of his facts; on the contrary, he collected and collated them with care, studied them, and drew conclusions from them. And, so far as his experience went, all the facts seemed to show that the particular form of Government which had been evolved by the democracies of the West was wholly unsuited to the peoples of the East. There autocracy was the indigenous, democracy a purely exotic growth. "Do not let us for one moment imagine," he once wrote, "that the fatally simple idea of despotic rule will readily give way to the far more complex conception of ordered liberty. The transformation, if it ever takes place at all, will probably be the work, not of generations, but of centuries."<sup>3</sup> And it seemed to him that the developments which took place in a number of Eastern lands during the later years of his own life did nothing to

<sup>1</sup> Report by Lord Cromer on the *Finances, Administration, and Condition of Egypt and the Sudan* in 1906. Cd. 3394.

<sup>2</sup> See an article entitled "An Indian Idealist," first published in the *Spectator* of July 12th, 1913.

<sup>3</sup> See "The Government of Subject Races" in the *Edinburgh Review* of January 1908.

shake, but much to confirm, this view. "The Eastern world," he wrote in May 1913, "is at present strewn with the *débris* of paper constitutions, which are, or are probably about to become, derelict"<sup>1</sup>; and, more than two years later, "Young Turkey has proved a complete failure. So has Young Persia. So has Young Egypt. And Young China does not appear to have been so far much more successful than any of these."<sup>2</sup>

Why was this? To Cromer the reason was obvious – because everywhere an attempt had been made to spring at one bound from absolutism to complete liberty. It could not be too clearly understood, he wrote in 1908, that, whether we dealt with the roots, or the trunk, or the branches, or the leaves, free institutions in the full sense of the term must for generations to come be wholly unsuitable to countries such as India and Egypt. This being his considered opinion, we need experience no surprise at his description of the tentative steps taken by Mr. Asquith's Government a year later in the direction of conferring a more representative form of Government on India, as "the somewhat sweeping reforms inaugurated by Lord Morley and Lord Minto."

Lord Cromer's personal experience was, of course, gained chiefly in Egypt. Certain arrangements for enabling the people to make their wishes known to the Government had been brought into operation in accordance with recommendations made by Lord Dufferin in a Report issued in 1883, on the eve of Lord Cromer's own arrival in Egypt as Consul-General. The organ through which public opinion thus expressed itself consisted of two bodies, known respectively as the Legislative Council and the General Assembly, both comparatively small bodies, composed of members in part nominated and in part selected by an indirect system of election. The Legislative Council met six times a year, the General Assembly less often – actually about once in two years.

<sup>1</sup> In the *Nineteenth Century and After*.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Spectator* of October 23rd, 1915.

"The Egyptian Legislative Assembly, which meets once in two years, and has a right to *émettre des vœux*," Lord Cromer mentioned in a letter to Lord Lansdowne in 1904, "has just expressed its wishes. They are that the Koran should be more freely taught, that expenditure should be in every direction increased, that numerous taxes should be abolished, that the capitulations should be swept away, and that a Parliament on a European model should be created – altogether a fairly extensive programme. Possibly by the year 2004, some portion of it may have been adopted."

Lord Dufferin's object had been "to erect some sort of barrier, however feeble, against the intolerable tyranny" of the former rulers of Egypt. Before Cromer himself left Egypt there had come into being a National Party whose object it was to convert these advisory bodies into an Egyptian Parliament; and it was to the activities of this party that he found himself obliged to devote an increasing share of his attention during the later years of his residence in the country.

The Nationalist movement in Egypt followed a course which has been rendered familiar by the analogous movement in India. As in that country, so in Egypt, it was rendered possible by the unwonted sense of security which the individual derived from the occupation of the country by British troops and from the abolition by the British administrator of the worst abuses of despotic rule; and it was fostered by the spread of education and the inculcation of a spirit of independence for which the liberal character of British rule was itself in the main responsible. It was accompanied in Egypt by manifestations similar to those which have marked the progress of the movement in Asia – a violent and sustained anti-Government and anti-foreign campaign in the vernacular Press and, combined incongruously with an unreasoning clamour for liberal institutions, a reactionary programme of a religious and cultural complexion. For, just as in India the movement has derived power and momentum

from the appeal made by the prospect of a Hindu cultural and religious revival, so in Egypt it gained appreciably in vigour from its association with forces working in the direction of Pan-Islamism.

It was characteristic of the Oriental mind that it should have perceived no inconsistency in combining a Pan-Islamic programme which, in so far as it involved an attempt to regenerate Islam on Islamic lines and to revivify and stereotype in the twentieth century the principles laid down more than a thousand years before for the guidance of a primitive society, was clearly reactionary, with a programme having for its avowed object the importation of an up-to-date and ready-made system of Government from the political factories of the democratic West. Men who expressed to Cromer a paradoxical desire to secure all the advantages of the British occupation, without the occupation itself; who urged a reduction of the European element in the public services at the same time that they pleaded for the appointment of a British, rather than an Egyptian, engineer to superintend the distribution of water in their own province, were not likely to be troubled by the inconsistency of their attitude in advocating at one and the same time the cause of Pan-Islamism and the establishment of a Parliamentary system.

The movement in Egypt, as in India, was further encouraged by events in England. Early in 1906 occurred the political landslide which swept the Conservative Party from office and filled the House of Commons with men imbued with ideas which, in many cases, went far beyond the moderate Liberalism of former years. And clamorous amongst the huge and unwieldy majority which Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman found at his disposal was an energetic coterie of persons whom Cromer dubbed compendiously "study politicians," composed largely of men whose zeal tended to outrun discretion and who were only too prone to allow their emotions to predominate over their reason. They had entered the

House of Commons with the conviction that into their special keeping had been entrusted by Providence the honour of Great Britain in her dealings with subject races.

Cromer, convinced of the correctness of his own view as to what was right in the best interests of the Egyptian people, turned a deaf ear to all uninformed clamour. His position was stated concisely in his Report to Sir Edward Grey in 1907. It was natural that in Egypt the educated youth should agitate for a greater share than heretofore in the government of the country. "Nothing could be more ungenerous than to withhold a certain amount of sympathy from these very legitimate aspirations. Nothing, on the other hand, could be more unwise than to abstain, at this early period of the National movement, from pointing out to all who are willing to listen to reason the limits which, for the time being, must be assigned to those aspirations. I am too true a friend to the Egyptian people to endeavour either to flatter or to deceive them."

He treated the Press with amazing restraint. "... Boyle tells me that the paper in question is the Egyptian *Punch*," he wrote when forwarding a sample to Rennell Rodd for his inspection. "From a Western point of view one is more struck with its patriotic mendacity than with its mirth."<sup>1</sup> He did not ignore the vernacular Press; on the contrary, he studied it with diligence, in the hope that he might find in it from time to time practical suggestions which might prove worthy of consideration. In this hope he was disappointed. He found instead that facts were generally misstated and often wilfully perverted; that vague declamation, wholly erroneous and even fantastic ideas as to the motives and intentions of Great Britain and the other Powers, and sweeping generalities unaccompanied by any semblance of proof, formed the principal stock-in-trade of its contributors. He was urged in many quarters to restrict its liberty, and he admitted that arguments drawn from

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated May 17th, 1900.

the violence of the campaign carried on in its columns during the year 1906 might fairly be used in support of a drastic curtailment of the freedom permitted to it. He himself, however, drew a different conclusion from the general state of unrest for which it was in the main responsible. It was that in order to afford an additional guarantee for law and order, and to inspire confidence amongst the law-abiding sections of the community, the British garrison should be increased. This was accordingly done – at an additional cost to the Egyptian taxpayer of £45,000 a year.

Was there, then, no hope of escape from the system under which no important law could be made applicable to the Europeans resident in Egypt without the consent of fifteen different Powers, and under which, consequently, Egypt had been reduced to a state of legislative impotence? Cromer did not despair of a solution, and before he left Egypt he made public the proposal which he advocated for freeing Egypt from the legislative shackles imposed upon her by the Capitulations.

In a letter to Lord Salisbury, which has been quoted earlier in this volume,<sup>1</sup> Cromer had laid stress upon one of the outstanding facts of the Egyptian situation, namely, the cosmopolitan character of its population; and in *Modern Egypt* he devoted no less than five chapters to a description of the different races resident in the land. In the circumstances there set forth, he held that the only possible Egyptian nationality in a political sense that could ever be brought into being must consist of all the dwellers in Egypt, irrespective of race, religion, or extraction. And, before any such fusion could be brought about, the Capitulations which separated off the foreigners resident in the country from the native inhabitants must be got rid of. His plan for effecting this was to transfer the powers vested in the various foreign Governments under the Capitulations to a local International Legislative Council. On different occasions he set forth in some

<sup>1</sup> See back, Chapter XIV., p. 164.



detail the scheme which he desired to see adopted ; but it is sufficient to quote here the brief passage in the last Report which he penned on the affairs of Egypt, in which the governing idea which he had in mind was clearly stated, and the means by which effect might be given to it, indicated :

“ So long as the régime of the Capitulations, in its  
“ present form, exists, not only must the Egyptians and  
“ the foreigners resident in Egypt always be divided into  
“ two separate camps, but also no thorough solidarity of  
“ interest can be established between the various com-  
“ munities of Europeans *inter se*. There can be no real  
“ cohesion and no concentrated action. That cohesion  
“ can only be secured by the creation of a local In-  
“ ternational Legislative Council. Apart from other  
“ grounds on which it may be defended as a reform  
“ beneficial alike to Europeans and Egyptians, I main-  
“ tain that this measure will tend more than any other  
“ to create a community of interest amongst the hetero-  
“ geneous population which inhabits the valley of the  
“ Nile, and that it will be a first step towards the forma-  
“ tion of an Egyptian national spirit in the only sense  
“ in which that spirit can be evoked without detriment  
“ to the true interests of the country. . . .  
“ The bestowal of legislative autonomy on the Euro-  
“ peans resident in Egypt, to take the place of the  
“ present cumbersome and unworkable system of  
“ legislation by diplomacy, is a measure naturally  
“ indicated by the ordinary canons which apply to  
“ political evolution.”

It may be urged that there is little in such a programme to satisfy the aspirations of Young Egypt. That is, no doubt, true. But Cromer was not out to minister to the appetite of Young Egypt for political power, but rather to further the best interests of the land he had served so faithfully and so long.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### CROMER IN ENGLAND

CROMER left Egypt on May the 6th, 1907, a very sick man. In the letter to Sir Edward Grey, written on March the 28th, in which he had announced his intention of retiring, he traced the first symptoms of ill health to "a domestic cause, the force of which none, unfortunately, are more able to appreciate than yourself." He had struggled on, but year by year the struggle had become more difficult to maintain. "I need hardly tell you that it costs me a bitter pang to throw up my work, more especially as I shall rather have the appearance of retiring in the face of the enemy. . . . But I have no doubt whatever of the wisdom – and, indeed, the absolute necessity – of the step I am taking." To Sir Edward Grey the news which he first received by telegram came as "a great shock," and filled him with dismay. "There is nothing which could make so great and irreparable a gap in the public service of this country as your retirement from it." He begged that if he could reconsider the step he would do so. But on receipt of his letter he realized that this could not be. "I have read your letter, and I understand that you had no choice after the doctor's opinion. . . . And, much as I regret having to face the problems of Egypt (for as long as you were there I did not feel that it was really I who had to face them), I know that there is no more distressing mistake than for a man to attempt to make his strength last beyond what Nature will allow."

How near Cromer had come to making that mistake was apparent from his condition on reaching England. With his release from responsibility the inevitable reaction had set in ; and he spent his first six weeks of freedom in a nursing-home. This was followed by a period of convalescence in Scotland, and it was not until the autumn

that his health was sufficiently restored to allow him to undertake work of any kind. During this period of enforced idleness he must have been greatly cheered by the proofs which constantly reached him, both from public and from private sources, of the estimation in which he and his services to the State were held. He must, indeed, have been more than human had he not experienced a thrill of satisfaction at the extraordinary outburst of popular applause which his retirement evoked. Looking back some time afterwards over the twenty-four years of his control of affairs in Egypt, he himself selected as the outstanding achievements of his time, four major objects successfully accomplished. First and foremost, the Anglo-French Agreement of 1904, on which he looked back with far greater pride and pleasure than on any other feature of his long career ; secondly, the financial regeneration of the country ; thirdly, the reduction of taxation and the remedy of other popular grievances ; and fourthly, the restoration of the Sudan to Egypt. These were great and tangible achievements. But over and above these definite fruits of his long labours was the subtle and indefinable influence which he exerted on the history of Egypt as a result of his own powerful personality—a thing greater, perhaps, in its results, both direct and indirect, than all the achievements of a kind capable of being catalogued. Not least of the features of his long régime, for example, was the remarkable confidence which his presence in Egypt invariably inspired. The sense of security created amongst a class at all times particularly sensitive to movements of the political barometer, was of more than ordinary significance. “ We did not care much what happened,” a member of the European commercial community wrote a short time before Cromer sailed for home, “ as long as we knew your Lordship was at the helm.” The same thought must have been uppermost in the mind of the British Ambassador when he wrote from Constantinople : “ I am greatly afraid that your departure will oblige us to double the

present number of British troops in Egypt." Neither was his influence confined to Egypt or the Sudan. "Except for a king or two," the British representative wrote from Abyssinia, "your's was the only foreigner's name outside Abyssinia that Menelek knew, and he had a very wholesome respect for it."

The subtle influence which Cromer wielded over all and sundry had its roots in his character. He himself held that the first and most important duty of the British representative in Egypt was, by example and precept, to set up a high standard of morality, both in his public and private life, and thus endeavour to raise the standard of those around him.<sup>1</sup> Few men can have lived up so successfully as he did to the dictates of a high ideal. "There is not one of our nation," wrote a young Copt, "who does not feel as bereaved by this resignation as if we had lost the last of our Pharaohs." The admission was all the more striking by reason of the fact that the writer had not been untouched by the nationalistic fervour of the day. That their sentiments had been wounded he did not deny; "but we always knew that in him we had a truly religious man at our helm, and that is what gave us our confidence in him." Cromer was always generous in the credit which he gave to others. Any success which he had achieved in raising the standard of public morality in Egypt he owed, he said, to the co-operation of a body of high-minded British officials who had persistently held up to all with whom they were brought into contact a standard of probity formerly unknown in that country. But the officials in question would have been the first to admit how much they themselves owed to the inspiration of their chief. "I do not think it possible for any man . . . to have had the privilege . . . of working under you for so many years," Sir William Garstin wrote, "without insensibly becoming – from your example – larger-minded and more generous in his views and ideas."

How deeply his personality had impressed itself upon

<sup>1</sup> See *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 322.

the population became apparent some time after his own death. During the year 1921 Mr. Harry Boyle, who was revisiting Egypt, was approached by a peasant some miles out of Cairo with a request to be told the time. On Boyle answering him, the peasant said, "Was it not you who used to walk on the Nile banks with *Kroumer* when he talked with the people?" On hearing that this was so, he kissed Boyle's hand and said, "Greeting and welcome! Thanks be to God for your return to us." More striking still was the action of two strangers on donkeys who, seeing Boyle and noticing that he was lame, insisted on him mounting one of the beasts and accompanying him home. On being offered payment, they refused to take anything, exclaiming, "We take nothing for a service to a man of *Kroumer's*."

The opinion held of his work in Egypt in the highest political circles in England was voiced by men so different in many respects as Mr. Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Curzon. "It is, indeed, a complete page of history that you have inscribed in Egypt," the former wrote, "and among the Empire builders of the Victorian age you will always occupy one of the most distinguished places." Precisely similar sentiments were expressed by Lord Curzon in slightly different words: "Your departure from Egypt marks the end of a great epoch and the termination of a public career that has known no superior, and, I think too, no equal in the long and fateful record of Britain's dealings with foreign peoples."

Popular approval found expression in various ways. A sum of £50,000 was voted by Parliament in recognition of the exceptional nature of Lord Cromer's services to the Empire – a signal mark of the nation's approbation, since, with the single exception of Sir Rowland Hill, such rare exhibitions of popular favour had in the past been confined to great military commanders to whom the nation had been indebted for salvation when swept along on the tide of some great national emergency. And in the autumn, when his health was sufficiently restored to

enable him to take part once more in public life, the Freedom of the City of London was conferred upon him, his name being thus added to the historic roll of those who, as the City Chamberlain reminded the guests present at the ceremony, had, in their time and generation, been instrumental in creating, defending, developing, and consolidating our mighty Empire – warriors, statesmen, diplomatists, those versed in literature, science, and art, as also philanthropists who had laboured to raise and elevate the social, moral, and religious tone of the British people.

. . . . .  
With returning health Cromer began to take soundings in the unfamiliar waters of English public life. An invitation to proceed as Ambassador to Berlin, extended to him by Sir Edward Grey shortly after his return from Egypt, left him cold, for he had no wish to resume official life in unfamiliar – and possibly uncongenial – surroundings. On the other hand, he was ill suited to the conditions of Parliamentary life in England, since, with his cross-bench outlook, he was scarcely likely to find a comfortable niche in the household of either political party. Yet his active brain, as Sir Edmund Gosse once remarked, could not endure “to be left stranded with no theme on which to expatiate.”

During the early months of convalescence, when, under the solicitous care of Lady Cromer, strength came flowing back to the tired frame, he turned with avidity to the literature which never failed to provide him with a companionship which he loved. He was at all times an eager, he became during these days of comparative leisure, an omnivorous, reader. Before writing his *Life of Shakespeare*, Sir Sidney Lee devoted eighteen years of his own life to a study of Elizabethan literature. Cromer, who admitted that he could scarcely boast that he had devoted as many days as Sir Sidney Lee had years to Shakespearean study, read, nevertheless, the seven hundred and twenty closely printed pages of his work

"without for one moment feeling his interest flag, or wishing that, in Horatian language, the risk of being obscure had been incurred by enforced brevity."<sup>1</sup> He read or re-read many of the Greek classics, and innumerable volumes in English or French on classical subjects. Gilbert Murray's *Ancient Greek Literature* and Mommsen's *History of Rome*; Mahaffy's *Social Life in Greece* and Fowler's *Social Life in Rome*; Jebb's *Growth and Influence of Classical Poetry*, Sandys's *History of Classical Scholarship*, and many other recondite works, all afforded welcome grist to the ceaseless mill of his extraordinarily acquisitive intellect. "I have during the last four years," he noted in 1911, "got through a good deal of desultory reading, either in the shape of new books or of re-reading those which I had read before. In studying the classics I have made use of cribs. But most of my reading, though somewhat desultory, has been thorough." If proof were wanted of this latter assertion, it is to be found in the four large volumes of his *Commonplace Books*, storehouses of wisdom in prose and verse in English, Greek, and other languages, compiled with an industry which can only be described as amazing.

His study of the classics was put to good use when, in 1910, as President of the Classical Association, he delivered his presidential address, subsequently published in a revised and enlarged form under the title of *Ancient and Modern Imperialism*, of which Mr. S. H. Butcher wrote, "If most of the facts are not new, you have made them new and original by your treatment and by the striking parallels and contrasts gathered from your own great administrative experience, and, may I add, from your astonishingly wide range of reading"<sup>2</sup>; and Professor Ramsay, that he had never read anything which combined so tersely and so forcibly the practical and the theoretical, the knowledge that came from the handling of great affairs with the insight of the philosopher.

<sup>1</sup> See an article in the *Spectator* of January 29th, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated April 26th, 1909.

Lord Cromer kept a list of the books which he read during the first four years of his time in England. In addition to a number of the Greek and Latin classics, it contained the names of over sixty volumes on subjects associated with classical literature, nearly forty books on economics, more than forty on Eastern subjects, twenty-eight volumes in French, mostly on historical subjects, more than sixty under the heading "Historical and Political," and forty which he designated "Literary and Miscellaneous," this category including such works as Beer's *History of English Romanticism*, Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, Brandes's *Main Currents of Nineteenth Century Literature*, Winwoode Reade's *Martyrdom of Man*, O. W. Holmes's *Autocrat of the Breakfast-table*, and Calderon's *Life of a Salmon*. Fiction added little to his literary fare; under this head appear the names of eight books only, including Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, *Shirley*, and *Jane Eyre*, and Peacock's *Gryll Grange* and *Nightmare Abbey*.

As time went on he became a frequent contributor to the *Spectator* and other periodicals, his contributions usually taking the form of reviews of books. A number of these miscellaneous writings were republished in 1913, 1914, and 1916 in three volumes, entitled *Political and Literary Essays*; but his best-known and most successful literary work was his two-volume book on *Modern Egypt*, on which he had been engaged for many years, and the manuscript of which he completed as soon as his health was sufficiently restored to permit him to resume serious work. This gave him little trouble, for the book was practically written before his retirement. "I added a little," he wrote, "and omitted a great deal." The book was published in January 1908 by Messrs. Macmillan, and proved an immediate and remarkable success. Within the next two and a half years over nine thousand copies were sold in the United Kingdom, and more than four thousand copies in America; and permission was sought and granted for translations of the work



into German and Japanese. Demand for the book continued, and at a later date a cheaper edition was issued.

Of the merits of the book it is scarcely necessary to speak. Lord Morley found in the style of narrative, with its directness and concision, a convincing illustration of a favourite proposition of his own, that a man of action, when he wrote about his own affairs, like Cæsar, or Napoleon, or the old Duke, wrote better than anybody. To those best able to judge, an outstanding feature of the work was the remarkable insight into the mentality of the East which it displayed. Sir Adam Block, whose own life was spent in contact with, and in study of, the peoples of Turkey, regarded it as being of special value to all those who had endeavoured to fathom the Oriental mind and to understand Oriental methods and motives; and, in the opinion of another well-known Orientalist whose profound knowledge of Eastern thought had been acquired in India, the whole of Cromer's disquisition on the state of society and the condition, moral and material, of the various classes of Egypt was full of that kind of sound knowledge and insight that grows ripe only on the tree of personal knowledge and long study at first hand.<sup>1</sup>

And so the days passed by, and it almost seemed as if the life to which, as a young man, Evelyn Baring had looked forward—that, namely, of a man of leisure tempered by such work as a dilettante's love of literature might bring his way—was now to be his. Yet there were influences which urged a more active participation in public affairs; there was Cromer's own sense of public duty, and there were the long years during which he had become inured to a life of action. What direction should his activities take? He watched with solicitude and, as the years passed, with some concern, the progress of affairs in Egypt. In his farewell speech in Cairo he had said that "a steady jog-trot" was the pace best suited to advance the interests of the country, and he had

<sup>1</sup> Sir Alfred Lyall.

expressed the fear that, if the pace were greatly mended, the horse would come down and break his knees.<sup>1</sup>

In a final chapter to *Modern Egypt*, entitled "The Future of Egypt," written after his return to England and substituted for the chapter with which he had originally intended to close the book,<sup>2</sup> he repeated the warning in greater elaboration. Sir Eldon Gorst, who succeeded him, had been given the appointment on Cromer's own recommendation. He had been eighteen years in the country; he spoke the language; he had been trained by Cromer and had worked in complete agreement with him. Cromer had every reason to suppose, therefore, that he would continue to carry out the policy which he had laid down, namely, that of a tempered and benevolent despotism. But in order to carry out such a programme, as Cromer himself observed in another connection, it was essential to find a suitable despot.<sup>3</sup> And, as events soon proved, Sir Eldon Gorst, with all his ability and many admirable qualities, was not cut out to play the part of a benevolent despot. Circumstances were in any case against him. He had not the prestige which had enabled Cromer to resist the pressure of the Radical wing in Parliament, and he had not been long in control before it became evident that the jog-trot on which Cromer had laid so much stress was tending to pass into a dangerous gallop.

Cromer had himself taken a step forward in the direction of popularizing the Government when, shortly before leaving Egypt, he had appointed an Egyptian with Nationalist leanings, Saad Zagloul, to be Minister of Education. He had made the appointment as an experiment, to be carefully watched before it was repeated. No such caution was shown after his departure, and an impression was soon created in Egypt that control had

<sup>1</sup> Speech in Cairo on May 6th, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> The discarded chapter was subsequently published as an article in the *Edinburgh Review* with the title of "The Government of Subject Races."

<sup>3</sup> In an article entitled "The Suicide of the Turk," first published in the *Spectator* of October 23rd, 1915.

passed from the British Government to the Egyptian Ministry. A quarter of a century before, Lord Granville had failed to realize that the fact of our being in occupation of Egypt fixed upon us, in the eyes of Europe, the responsibility of government. To Cromer it seemed that Lord Granville's mistake was being repeated. And if this, indeed, was so, the policy which Cromer had long planned of transferring the power of legislation from the European Powers in whom it was vested under the Capitulations, to a representative international body in Egypt, was doomed ; for unless the Powers were satisfied that the British Government were paramount, it was hopeless to suppose that they would consent to any modification of the Capitulations.

Cromer, indeed, found serious cause for differing with those now responsible for the policy of Great Britain in Egypt. He had never underestimated the evils of personal Government, and during his long residence he had "tortured his brains," to use his own expression, as to what could be done to place the whole Government on a basis on which it would rely more on institutions and less on persons. But the material for doing so did not exist, and out of his long experience and profound knowledge of Egypt he drew the conclusion that it was hopeless to suppose that within any near future anything in the way of native institutions could take the place of personal rule. Once before an attempt had been made to fashion bricks without straw on the banks of the Nile. The attempt had not been successful, and Cromer saw no reason for renewing it and a great many reasons for not doing so. Yet here was the Government in London, carried along on the tide of democracy which was flowing strongly, not only in the West, but in such strongholds of conservatism as Turkey and Persia, lending their aid to a repetition of it.

What, in these circumstances, should Cromer do ? Since his return to England he had not been consulted by the Foreign Office with regard to the affairs of Egypt, for

the reason, possibly, that he was known to be out of harmony with the policy which was being pursued. Should he come forward and denounce it? In spite of his disagreement with the policy which Sir Eldon Gorst, under the general direction of Sir Edward Grey, was pursuing, he still entertained feelings of warm regard for him, and he hesitated to do anything which might embarrass him and render his task more difficult. He, therefore, remained silent. On the one occasion on which he volunteered advice, it was not taken. When the question of the Suez Canal came under consideration in 1910, he urged a prolongation of the Concession. A proposal to this effect was put forward, and then, under pressure from the Legislative Assembly, abandoned, with the result that a heavy blow was given to British influence in Egypt and a corresponding gain realized by the Nationalist Party.

Cromer's doubts and hesitations as to his duty in these very difficult circumstances were cut short in 1911, when he learned that Sir Eldon Gorst was afflicted with an incurable disease. His grief was deep and very real; but he did not doubt what his duty was in these changed circumstances. A man capable of playing the part of a benevolent despot must be found to succeed him. Was there such a man? One man there was whose personality loomed large in the eyes of the public both in Britain and in Egypt, and who, whatever else might be said of him, would not be likely to allow himself to be swept from the seat of despotic power by a democratic tide, however strong its current. Lord Cromer accordingly hurried to the Foreign Office, saw Sir Edward Grey, and urged the appointment of Lord Kitchener to fill the place about to be vacated by Sir Eldon Gorst. When, a short time afterwards, the post became vacant, the appointment recommended by Lord Cromer was made, and the Egyptian steed pulled sharply back from its headlong flight to the less spectacular, but infinitely safer, jog-trot of earlier days.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### MANY ACTIVITIES

SINCE Cromer had passed a self-denying ordinance upon himself in the matter of Egypt, on which subject, had he deemed it to be in the best interests of the two countries that he should do so, he could have given the public a lead, what line should he take in public life? What part should he aspire to play? There were many aspects of foreign policy on which his knowledge and experience entitled him to be heard with respect; and it was on a question of foreign policy that he made his maiden speech in Parliament, speaking from the cross-benches of the House of Lords.

The Anglo-Russian Agreement, which he had himself been so anxious to see concluded, had been fiercely attacked in its details from the front Opposition bench by Lord Curzon. Cromer rose, not to defend the particulars of the bargain which had been struck between Great Britain and Russia, but to urge on general grounds the supreme importance of an Agreement having been concluded. His support of the Anglo-Russian Agreement was based on two main grounds; in the first place, on the importance of securing for Great Britain, in the increasingly difficult task of adjusting her relations with the peoples of the Orient, a field free from Russian interference, and, in the second place, on the desirability of establishing in Europe an understanding between the Powers who stood to lose most from German aggression.

The difficulty and importance of the problems arising out of the increasingly intimate contact between the peoples of the West and those of the East were growing rapidly with the passage of the years. A whole series of

causes was combining to add to their complexity. "The growth of democracy [in Great Britain]," Lord Cromer pointed out, "has very much increased the difficulties of the problem which was described some years ago by Mr. Bright as that of governing a people by a people – the people of India by the people of England." But a further source of difficulty in the discharge of this task was to be found in the jealousies and rivalries of the European Powers themselves. Examples abounded; in Morocco the tension between two of the great Powers of Europe had been fraught with danger to the peace of the world. In Macedonia, European rivalry had been responsible for the introduction of "the particularly cumbersome and inconvenient machinery of Internationalism." In Persia the antagonism between Russia and Great Britain created a field "for the exercise of that art in which astute Oriental statesmen excel – the art of sowing discord between two European nations." If, then, the democracies of the West were to approach the solution of the problems presented to them by their relations with the peoples of the East with any hope of success, they must do so unhampered by the hostility of other European Powers.

His other main ground needs no further explanation than that given in Chapter XXIII. He had always been a warm advocate of the Anglo-Russian Convention, he told a correspondent some years afterwards, quite apart from the question of the details of the Convention itself, some of which, he admitted, might be open to criticism.

"I take as my point of departure a consideration which  
"I believe to be profoundly true, and that is, that the  
"great danger to this country at present comes from  
"Germany, and, if this aspect of the case is correct,  
"manifestly it is most desirable for us to establish very  
"friendly relations with both France and Russia. It  
"was this consideration, amongst others, that made me  
"throw myself heart and soul into the Anglo-French  
"Convention of 1904, which I foresaw at the time was  
"an indispensable preliminary to an understanding

“with Russia, and would almost certainly lead up to  
“it.”<sup>1</sup>

It is curious that so eminent a writer as Mr. Lytton Strachey should have fallen into the error of supposing that the East meant little to Lord Cromer.<sup>2</sup> Men like Sir Alfred Lyall and Sir Adam Block took, as we have seen, a different view ; so, be it added, did Lord Morley, who pressed Cromer to accept a seat on the India Council, and who, when he found that under the existing Act the acceptance of his offer would debar Cromer from sitting and voting in Parliament, declared his intention of consulting the Prime Minister on the desirability of introducing legislation to alter the existing law. “It will be one of the most vexatious disappointments in my official existence,” he wrote, “if we cannot overcome the obstacle.”<sup>3</sup> Cromer himself was not unwilling, provided his acceptance did not involve “political extinction.” If matters could be so arranged, he would be “most happy to join the Council.” Difficulty in removing the obstacle proved, apparently, too great ; for Cromer retained his freedom and Lord Morley went without the benefit of his services on the Council.

The truth was that study of the East, and particularly of the problem presented by the relations between East and West, was one of the chief preoccupations of Cromer’s life. He spoke with restraint on Lord Morley’s India Councils Bill of 1909, and gave it qualified support. He differed from the majority in thinking that the appointment of an Indian to the Viceroy’s Executive Council was less open to objection than the proposals for conferring upon Indians wide legislative powers.

“I know that the legislative experiment has to be  
“tried, but I must confess that I have no very great  
“confidence in the result of the experiment. If we

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Sir John Rees, November 24th, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> “The East meant very little to him ; he took no interest in it.” – Mr. Lytton Strachey in *Eminent Victorians*.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Lord Cromer, October 1st, 1907.

“ consider the immense diversity of race, religion, and language in India, and also the fact that we shall be endeavouring to transplant to India a plant entirely of exotic growth and placing it in a very uncongenial soil, I must confess for my own part that I shall be very much surprised if the legislative experiment does succeed.”<sup>1</sup>

But while Cromer did not underestimate the importance of the political facet of the question, he never allowed concentration on schemes designed to confer some measure of self-government upon subject Oriental races to blind him to the fact that this was but a single aspect of a stupendous problem. “ The problem,” he told Lord Morley, “ really is how European civilization is to be introduced into Eastern countries without undermining the foundations on which the whole fabric of society rests.” Throughout the years of his service in Egypt he had pondered upon this question ; but, though various palliatives had occurred to him, the very melancholy conclusion had been forced upon him that no general solution was to be found. Differences of religion constituted, to his mind, the bedrock of the whole difficulty. “ Bear in mind,” he bade Lord Morley, “ that the Romans, who were much more successful than any modern nation in carrying out a policy of fusion, were brought up short directly they had to deal with the modern Imperial problem of assimilating a people such as the Jews, who held to a non-assimilative religion.” So far, then, as history threw any light upon the matter, it had little hope to offer.

The question of inter-marriage – “ the great social assimilator ” – was one to which Cromer had given much thought ; and he saw little likelihood of the forces which had hitherto operated against inter-marriage between the white and the coloured races on any large scale becoming less in any future which he could foresee. Experience in both hemispheres was against the probability of any such

<sup>1</sup> Speech in the House of Lords, February 24th, 1909.



change. He observed, for example, that a large number of the more educated people in the southern States of America were moving steadily in the direction of improving the lot of the negro in matters connected with education and in other directions, but that they absolutely rejected any attempt at social assimilation which they feared might eventually lead to inter-marriage. In the case of India, powerful barriers to fusion existed on both sides – notably, in the case of the Hindus, the caste system, – and short of fusion he could find no real solution of the problem with which they were confronted. He appealed to Lord Morley to apply his own wide knowledge of history and his appreciation of the moral and political forces at work in East and West to the problem—

“ I am, even at this late hour, reluctant to accept the conclusion that there is nothing for it but to go on drifting, and to rely for the future more upon luck than upon policy. We are amongst the breakers, but we are not yet on the rocks. I cannot help fearing – although it will probably not occur in your day or mine – that we run a great risk of crashing upon them before long, and that the adoption of all our essentially British ideas of self-government and the like cannot really be relied upon to avert the danger.”<sup>1</sup>

Holding such views, it was natural that he should attach the utmost importance to the establishment of a School of Oriental Studies in England. He urged the creation of such an institution, not merely for the purpose of providing facilities for the acquisition of a grounding in Eastern languages, but to afford instruction in Oriental history, religion, manners, and customs. “ Indeed, if such a thing be at all possible,” he urged, when discussing the recommendations of a committee which had been considering the question under the chairmanship of Lord Reay, “ I should be very glad to see lectures given by qualified people on Oriental character and mental

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated June 27th, 1909.

processes.”<sup>1</sup> It did, indeed, appear to him to be astounding, in view of Great Britain’s enormous political and commercial interests in the East, that whilst Berlin, Paris, and Vienna had large Oriental colleges in receipt of Government subsidies, nothing of the kind existed in the United Kingdom. And when, some time afterwards, he was invited by Lord Morley to undertake the chairmanship of a small committee charged with the task “of formulating in detail an organized scheme for the institution in London of a School of Oriental Languages upon the lines recommended in the Report of Lord Reay’s Committee,” he willingly accepted the invitation.

The difficulties in the way proved to be much more formidable than had been expected, and it was not until four years after the appointment of the committee that Lord Cromer felt justified in approaching the King with a view to his becoming the patron of the institute. “The whole of this has been very uphill work,” he wrote in March 1914, “and has given me a great deal more trouble than I at all anticipated when at Lord Morley’s request I took it up.”<sup>2</sup> Even now the work was not finished, and failing health obliged him to relinquish the chairmanship before the coping-stone was placed on his achievement.

Neither was this the only important work of a non-party nature which he undertook. His detachment from party and his complete disinterestedness, no less than his driving-force and sound judgment, marked him down as one whose aid was particularly valuable whenever a thankless and difficult task had to be accomplished. He sometimes said that it seemed to be his *métier* to play the part of an apostle of unpopular causes. He had not been back in England long before he was asked to become President of the Men’s League for Opposing Female Suffrage. In co-operation with Lord Curzon, he succeeded in effecting an amalgamation between the men’s

<sup>1</sup> Speech in the House of Lords, September 27th, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Crewe, March 31st, 1914.

and the women's leagues, of which he then became President, and in raising a fund by voluntary subscription of £20,000 for the prosecution of the work.

His opposition to Women's Suffrage was based on his reverence for women as such. The statement attributed to the founder of the Mohammedan faith, that Paradise lay at the feet of mothers, appealed to him as rivalling in beauty and in pathos anything to be found either in the prose or the poetry of Christianity ; and he dreaded the consequences of any successful attempt to break down the barrier which Nature herself imposed between the sexes. Men and women might be equal, but no amount of argumentation could alter the fact that they were different. There was no more sense in comparing women with men in the way in which the advocates of Female Suffrage sought to do, than there would be in comparing a Chippendale cabinet with a play of Shakespeare. " I take it that the profoundly true moral which you wish your readers to draw," he wrote in the course of an appreciation of *Delia Blanchflower*, by Mrs. Humphry Ward, " is that, in spite of all sorts of antics, intellectual and moral, the *ewig weibliche* – as also the *ewig männliche* – far from being extirpated, eventually re-assert themselves in full and imperious majesty. In truth, there is a good deal of human nature in man, and also in woman, which cannot be eradicated, not even by hosts of Pankhursts and their acolytes."<sup>1</sup>

Other posts which he accepted were those of President of the Research Defence Society and Chairman of the Entomological Research Committee set up by Lord Crewe with the object of encouraging entomological study in Great Britain. His acceptance of the former post brought him into sharp conflict with the anti-vivisectionist members of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, of which he was himself a Vice-President, this rank having been conferred upon him by the Society in recognition of the services which he had

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mrs. Humphry Ward, February 1st, 1915.

rendered to their cause during his long residence in Egypt. So high did feeling at one time run, that a resolution calling upon him to resign his Vice-Presidentship of the R.S.P.C.A. was carried.

The Council of the Society showed their wisdom by repudiating the action of the members and by passing a resolution of their own in which they expressed the opinion that there was no reason why Lord Cromer could not continue honourably to hold the position of a Vice-President of the R.S.P.C.A. Any other decision would, indeed, have constituted a grave injustice to Lord Cromer, who held not only that there was nothing inconsistent between a detestation of wanton cruelty to animals and approval of experiments on living creatures, in order to relieve human suffering as well as suffering in dumb animals, but that the one attitude was almost the necessary consequence and corollary of the other. That the experiments should be undertaken under conditions which, so far as possible, obviated the infliction of pain, by the proper use of anæsthetics, he always insisted ; and he regarded it as a not unimportant part of the duty of the Society of which he was President to insure that these conditions were scrupulously observed. That the scruples, founded, as he believed, largely on ignorance, of a body of men and women, however creditable to their humanity, should be allowed to weigh in the scale against the marvellous edifice of modern medicine and surgery built up from the days of Harvey's epoch-making discovery of the circulation of the blood onwards, on a basis of experiments on living animals, seemed to him to be preposterous. Was the sum total of pain and suffering that had been prevented to be regarded as of no account ?

The same qualities which led to so much competition for his services in posts such as those referred to above caused him to be sought after for the discharge of important work in the committee-rooms of the House of Lords. Sometimes, through no fault of his own, the results of much painstaking labour were brought to

naught by the intolerance of other people. A case in point was that of a Private Bill Committee which sat for more than three months under his chairmanship in 1908, in an attempt to deal with the problem presented by the electric lighting of London. "All our time and labour were thrown away," he noted. "On the one hand the Moderate majority in the London County Council were opposed to municipal enterprise; on the other hand, the Radical majority in the House of Commons were determined that no terms should be approved which would tempt private enterprise." He was more successful in securing agreement to a scheme of amalgamation of the various boroughs of the Potteries districts in Staffordshire in 1909, and to a project for the extension of Birmingham in 1911.

At the invitation of the Speaker and the Master of the Rolls he acted as arbitrator between the employers and men of the Midland Railway Company in a dispute which broke out in the spring of 1909. But it must not be supposed that his preoccupation with these many public activities prevented him from playing an influential part, which was none the less effective because it was enacted for the most part in the shadow of the wings rather than in the full blaze of the limelight on the stage, in those stirring events which marked the political revolution which overtook Great Britain with the fall of Mr. Balfour's Government and the opening of the flood-gates to an inrush of democracy in the early days of the year 1906. Such was far from being the case, and the part which he played, and the manner of his playing it, will be set forth in the ensuing chapter.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A STUDY IN POLITICAL PRINCIPLES

POLITICALLY, the England that Cromer returned to after his long absence abroad was a very different place from the England of Palmerston, which was the England that he had known when, as a young man, he had first interested himself in the political life of the nation as it eddied round him. His earliest, and for that reason, perhaps, his vividest, recollections were of the England of the mid-Victorian era ; the England of the old Army Purchase system ; the England in which Whigs and Peelites still strutted the stage, comfortably wedded, in the domestic sphere, to a policy of *laissez faire*, and in which the views of "Finality Jack"<sup>1</sup> on democracy were still those widely prevalent in the ranks of both parties in the State. It is true that about the time when such views were challenged and finally overthrown by Bright, with his monster reviews of the population of the industrial North and his addresses "of classical eloquence and Radical vigour"<sup>2</sup> on the subject of the political rights of Demos, Evelyn Baring returned for a time to England ; but he was then occupied with his military duties and with preparing himself for the Staff College, and had little leisure to concern himself with the changes which were going on around him.

On the eve of his return to England on retirement, democracy had made one of its periodical leaps forward. The working men enfranchised by Disraeli in 1867, mainly as a result of Bright's exertions in the autumn of 1866, had returned no representatives of their own class to

<sup>1</sup> Lord John Russell, whose view that the Reform Bill of 1832 represented the last word in the matter of the Franchise was strongly held until a defeat of his Government in 1851 obliged him to give up his old position of finality.

<sup>2</sup> *British History in the Nineteenth Century*, by G. M. Trevelyan.

further their cause in Parliament ; in 1900, a Conference of Labour organizations had decided to establish a self-contained Labour group in Parliament distinct from, and independent of, the other parties in the House of Commons, and at the General Election of 1906, twenty-nine out of fifty-one candidates run under the auspices of the Labour Representation Committee had been elected. Between a small and chastened Conservative Party on the right, and a small but earnest Labour group on the left, was a swollen Liberal Party still containing a few distinguished members who could justly claim to be the lawful heirs of the old Liberal tradition, but containing also a large and aggressively Radical tail.

Conscious, therefore, of the extent of the gap which he would have to bridge before he could adjust himself to the circumstances of this new and unfamiliar England, Cromer returned from abroad intent on holding himself aloof from the party controversies of the day. He soon found, however, that if he was to do more than play the part of an observer from a position of aloof detachment, making only occasional incursions into the arena, he must of necessity associate himself with one or other of the political parties in the State. And here he found himself in a position of no small difficulty ; for, while he had remained true to the political principles of his youth, he was quick to discover that both the historic parties had slipped their moorings.

There has been little occasion in the course of this biography to say much of Cromer's political opinions, since throughout his years abroad he served with singular fidelity both parties in the State. Nevertheless, his was a strongly held and clear-cut creed ; one which, resting as it did on a broad foundation of principle, was little liable to the fluctuations dictated by an opportunism characteristic of the age. He was first and foremost an individualist – “ the primary business of any Government is not to trade, but to administer. . . . ”<sup>1</sup> Fundamentally, that

<sup>1</sup> See an article on Burma, first published in the *Spectator* of June 28th, 1913.

is to say, he adhered to the school of thought which, founded two centuries ago by Du Quesnay and the French Physiocrats, reached its zenith in the person of Adam Smith. He was prepared to admit that there might be questions arising out of the complexity of modern government and society to which its philosophy was incapable of affording an answer ; yet it had laid fast hold of " one unquestionably sound principle. It entertained a deep mistrust of Government interference in the social and economic relations of life."<sup>1</sup>

Cromer's strong leanings in this respect were partly the outcome of temperament and partly of actual experience. He possessed the self-reliance of the man of action, and the whole of his experience in governing subject races confirmed him in his belief in the supreme value of initiative and a readiness to shoulder responsibility on the part of the individual. " The principle of relying largely on individual effort," he wrote, " has, in truth, produced marvellous results. It is singularly suited to develop some of the best qualities of the vigorous, self-assertive Anglo-Saxon race. It is to be hoped that self-help may long continue to be our national watchword."<sup>1</sup> His dislike of protection was fundamentally a dislike of State interference in matters which he considered were much better left to private enterprise. All taxes were, in his view, an evil, though no doubt to some extent a necessary evil ; and, this being so, it was the height of economic wisdom to see that they were not permitted to rise above the irreducible *minimum* required to meet the essential expenditure of the State. Throughout his public career, both in India and in Egypt, he had acted consistently upon this principle. " It must never be forgotten," he declared in the course of a speech delivered at Khartoum in December 1900, " that however desirable any improvement, considered on its own merits, may be, an essential condition to its execution is that there shall be no increase

<sup>1</sup> See " The Government of Subject Races," first published in the *Edinburgh Review* of January 1908.



of the fiscal burdens imposed on the Egyptian people for the sake of the Sudan, and that the burdens on the Sudanese people should be kept as low as circumstances will permit. Low taxation must be placed before every other interest." And he scorned the idea – even in the case of an industrial country – that any economic advantage could in any circumstances be derived from the imposition of a tax. Economic troubles would only be increased by "the pursuit into the economic wilderness of the *ignis fatuus* involved in the idea that it is possible for a nation to impose a tax on itself and then make the inhabitants of other countries pay the whole or the greater part of it."<sup>1</sup>

It was an incidental but none the less an invaluable advantage of a Free Trade policy that, besides being economically beneficial to the country practising it, it should also tend, in the case of an Imperial Power such as Britain, to lessen the antagonism of rival nations. "Can anyone doubt," Cromer asked some years before Mr. Joseph Chamberlain left the Government to propound his programme to the country, "that our Free Trade policy has exercised a very steadying effect on all the loose Anglophobia current on the Continent?"<sup>2</sup> He spoke with knowledge, for it was the insertion of a Free Trade clause in the Anglo-Egyptian Convention of 1899 that had secured acceptance on the part of the Powers of the *status* assumed by Great Britain in the Sudan. Cromer's personal experience on this aspect of the case was to him conclusive, and it was upon this particular advantage of a Free Trade policy that he dwelt in an address delivered at the International Free Trade Congress held at Antwerp in August 1910. He quoted with complete approval a statement made by Professor Dietzel in his work on *Retaliatory Duties*, in which he traced the connection between tariffs and armaments: "Germany set the bad example. . . . Russia, Austria-Hungary, Rumania, Switzerland,

<sup>1</sup> See an article entitled "The Fiscal Question in India," first published in the *Spectator* of July 19th, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Mr. St. Loe Strachey, July 10th, 1900.

Portugal, Holland, Servia, followed suit. . . . An international arming epidemic broke out." In his view there was an undoubted connection between tariff wars and the huge armaments maintained by every European State. Huge armaments involved heavy expenditure and high taxation ; high taxation was synonymous with unsound finance ; unsound finance was a primary cause of bad government ; and, as Publius Syrus observed, bad government will bring to the ground the mightiest Empire.

Free Trade, indeed, as Cromer interpreted the term, was much more than a mere matter of tariffs ; it was one aspect of a whole political philosophy the essence of which was a belief in the superiority of individual over State action.

"I have never accepted the view," he wrote in 1910, "that a Free Trade policy means merely an absence of taxes imposed for protective purposes. It means a great deal more than this. It means the support of individualism against collectivism, and, indeed, one of the main principles the old Free Traders had in view was to use Free Trade as a potent arm in the conduct of this warfare."<sup>1</sup>

It was an axiom of his political philosophy that good administration rested upon sound finance ; and it was his belief that under a democratic system it was very nearly impossible for anyone who had to deal with the finances of the country to be popular, if he wished to do his duty. Could a Chancellor of the Exchequer under an ultra-democratic system be relied upon to spurn popularity and do his duty ? Cromer was more than doubtful. When, in 1909, Mr. Lloyd George asked his opinion on the scheme of State insurance against sickness which the Government then had under consideration, he replied that he had no objection whatever in principle to urge against the State aiding a contributory scheme, *if* it could afford to do so. There was, however, a good deal in that *if* ; and he added :

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. Bernard Mallet, February 23rd, 1910.

"I cannot but think that it will be most dangerous to take any further liabilities. Indeed, I may go further and say that if I were in any degree responsible for the finances of this country, I do not think that any arguments whatever, whether based upon Parliamentary convenience or other considerations, would induce me to take any further liabilities beyond those connected with the army, navy, and old age pensions, which cannot possibly be avoided. I venture most earnestly to press this view of the question upon you."<sup>1</sup>

Such, then, being Cromer's political philosophy, with which party should he throw in his lot? Had the Liberal Party remained true to their original allegiance, there would have been no difficulty in providing an answer. But the Liberal Party in 1907, forsaking the altars of its own gods, seemed to him to be heading straight for Niagara under the heady influence of its recent intoxicating victories at the polls. His own youthful leanings towards the left, the outcome of a generous nature, had been tempered by experience, and he now viewed with profound distrust the inevitable consequences of the final flowering of democracy – "Count of Heads to be the Divine Court of Appeal on every question and interest of mankind," as, many years before, Carlyle had pictured it.

The lessons provided by his own experience in this respect were enforced by the conclusions which he drew from his reading of history. It was a favourite theory of his that history, if read with intelligence, could be made didactic; and nothing appealed more forcibly to him than the discovery of parallelisms between the experience of ancient and modern times. "Sometimes," as Sir Edmund Gosse observed, "the modern life of Egypt, exciting as it was, almost seemed to him a phantasmagoria dancing across the real world of Rameses." And there is little doubt, in his case at any rate, that long acquaintance with the government and administration of a country which

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 10th, 1909.

had at different times been under the sway of the Macedonian and the Roman, had to some extent bridged over the centuries and tended to bring forcibly to his mind that, at all events in respect to certain incidents, the world had not so very much changed in two thousand years.<sup>1</sup>

Little cause for surprise, then, if, when facing the unsolved problems which loomed large on the horizon of Imperial Britain, he turned for aid and enlightenment to the history of Imperial Rome. And amongst the forces which he perceived had been at work for the destruction of the prosperity of the Roman world were the grain-largesses to the populace of Rome. Would the great democracies of the twentieth century, he asked himself, in the words of Mr. Thomas Hodgkin,<sup>2</sup> "resist the temptation to use political power as a means of material self-enrichment?" Cromer feared greatly that they would not, and he watched for any sign that the Government which claimed to be the most faithful mirror of democracy which Great Britain had ever known intended pandering to this seductive yet fatal temptation. He had not long to wait.

In 1908 the Liberal Government did two things which in Cromer's view constituted a first step on the downward track. They sacrificed improvidently, and quite unnecessarily, £3,500,000 of revenue by the partial repeal of the sugar duties, and simultaneously they introduced a measure – the Old Age Pensions Bill – which was bound to impose a huge and unprovided-for drain upon the financial resources of the State. Here was a glaring example of the profligate finance which experience had taught him was an inevitable concomitant of all Socialistic programmes. Here was an obvious re-enactment on the stage of Imperial Britain of the prelude to the drama which had heralded the downfall of Imperial Rome. Here were the beginnings of those reckless expedients, based on a *Panem et Circenses* policy, "to fill the mouths and quell the voices of the multitude."

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient and Modern Imperialism.*

<sup>2</sup> *Italy and Her Invaders*, by Thomas Hodgkin, D.C.L.

But if the Liberal Party was thus worshipping at the altars of strange gods, could the plight of the Conservative Party be regarded as any better? Their fall from grace was to be traced back to their surrender to the magnetic personality of Disraeli, who had employed his brilliant genius in founding "a political school based on extreme self-seeking opportunism," and who had thereby contributed appreciably "towards the degradation of English political life."<sup>1</sup>

To Cromer's logical mind the cult of Tory democracy was a mere contradiction in terms, a pleasing chimera erected on a foundation of plausible unreality. Conservatives could appeal to the working classes by educating them and showing them that Socialism was diametrically contrary to their own interests. But, although they might gain some barren and ephemeral electoral advantages, they could not hope to advance the cause of rational conservative progress, either by alienating the middle classes, who were their natural allies, or by sailing under false colours before the masses. They could not advantageously masquerade in Radical clothes. Disraeli, he thought, altogether failed to see the consequences which would follow from the adoption of his political principles, as illustrated, for example, by his action in "dishing the Whigs" by forcing his reluctant followers to pass a Reform Bill far more radical than that which their opponents had themselves proposed. "He hoped that the Radical masses, whom he sought to conciliate, would look to the *patricians* as their guides. They had done nothing of the sort, but a very distinct tendency had been created amongst the *patricians* to allow themselves to be guided by the Radical masses."<sup>2</sup>

It was true that the Conservatives were now appealing to the middle classes, their natural allies, though former foes, to save them from the Frankenstein monster

<sup>1</sup> See an article entitled "Disraeli," written by Lord Cromer for the *Spectator* in November 1912.

<sup>2</sup> *Disraeli*.

which they had helped to raise. Yet – and here was the greatest paradox of all – they were doing so while at the same time they were embracing Protection, the hand-maiden of the monster whom they sought to lay. He was only too painfully aware, he told Mr. Bernard Mallet, that there was “a distinct connection between Socialism and Protection,” and that the Tariff Reformers were “deeply tainted with Socialistic tendencies.”<sup>1</sup>

The times, indeed, were gravely out of joint. Where, in this strange political topsy-turvydom, was Cromer to find a political home? There was one small island on which he might seek refuge. Like Lord Grosvenor and the Liberal opponents of Lord John Russell’s Reform Bill of 1866, the Duke of Devonshire and other Unionist opponents of Mr. Chamberlain’s Tariff Reform programme had entrenched themselves in a political cave of Adullam in 1903, and it was here that Cromer sought refuge from his political perplexities in 1907. At a dinner given by the Unionist Free Trade Club in November of that year he had declared himself to be “a convinced and wholly unrepentant Free Trader.” His accession to the ranks of this small but distinguished body was hailed with enthusiasm, and on the death of the Duke of Devonshire he was elected President of the Club in his place. And from this time onwards, until the organization broke up owing to a split in its ranks over Mr. Lloyd George’s Budget of 1909, he took a leading part in fighting the cause of Free Trade in the country, accepting among other offices that of President of the Manchester Free Trade League.

But not even in this haven was he to find rest for long. What had finally determined him to sever his connection with the Liberal Party had been the financial policy of the Government in 1908; and, though he still sat on the cross-benches in the House of Lords, he had taken occasion, when speaking against the Old Age Pensions Bill, to make his allegiance clear :

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated February 23rd, 1910.

“ At a later period of this debate your Lordships  
“ will, without doubt, hear the views entertained  
“ on this subject by the noble Marquess who is Leader  
“ of the Opposition [Lord Lansdowne], and whom I  
“ may, perhaps, be permitted to say, in spite of the  
“ slight Tariff Reform rift within the lute, I consider  
“ my leader, and whom I shall certainly follow on the  
“ present occasion.”

His criticism of the measure, it is needless to say, was based not so much upon any objection to the provision of pensions for the aged poor, as upon the unsound financial foundation on which the Bill itself rested. In his attack upon the Bill he declared that he could apply no other term but “reckless” to a plan which involved an enormous increase of expenditure without any adequate provision being made for meeting the liabilities when they fell due. But there was an even more important consideration to be borne in mind :

“ What, I would ask, in the present condition of  
“ Europe, is the main duty which devolves on the  
“ Government of this country? For my own part, I  
“ have no sort of hesitation in replying to this ques-  
“ tion. Their main duty is to make provision betimes  
“ for the European conflict which may not improbably  
“ be forced upon us before many years have elapsed.  
“ . . . I am now treading on delicate ground. It is  
“ neither necessary nor desirable that I should state  
“ at length my reasons for holding this opinion. . . .  
“ It is clear that if my diagnosis of the situation is  
“ correct, as I firmly believe it to be, the fact is of such  
“ vital importance as to cast all other subjects into  
“ insignificance. Our main duty, to my mind, is to  
“ husband our financial resources and to organize  
“ not only our naval, but our military, forces in such  
“ a manner as to meet whatever the future may bring  
“ forth. . . . Now if, as I hold, the consequences of this  
“ measure will be to necessitate the imposition of fresh  
“ taxes, every hundred pounds which is imposed,  
“ whether in a direct or an indirect form, will by so  
“ much weaken our ability to cope with the emergency  
“ when it arises. . . . The efficiency of the reserve is

“already impaired by keeping the income-tax at its  
 “present high rate in time of peace. . . . When the  
 “burden of fresh taxation which is inevitable begins  
 “to be felt, and when in times of national emergency  
 “all patriotic men cry out for these lost millions, let  
 “it be known, at all events, on whom rests the true  
 “responsibility for the creation of so sombre a situa-  
 “tion, and for the introduction of the financial revolu-  
 “tion – for such it really is – which will be inaugurated  
 “by this Bill.”

Here, then, was an example and a warning of the way that, under the pressure of democracy, Chancellors of the Exchequer seemed doomed to go. And these the first fruits of democracy in flood, in the shape of the financial profligacy of 1908, were quickly followed by still more exuberant growths – the Budget of 1909 and the challenge to the House of Lords, with its threat of single chamber government. It was with an anxious gaze that Cromer scanned the sky at the close of the year 1909.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE MENACE OF DEMOCRACY

IN the circumstances referred to at the close of the previous chapter, Cromer found his position, even in the group of Unionist Free Traders, one of increasing difficulty and embarrassment. Here was an outstanding instance of that political topsy-turvydom from which he sought vainly to escape – the party which was pledged to Free Trade indulging in fierce onslaught against nine-tenths of all those things which formed the very cornerstones of his own political creed. With some misgivings he had cut himself adrift from the Liberal Party and had thrown in his lot with the Unionist Free Traders, who seemed to him to stand most closely for the true principles of Liberalism. But even here the rank growth of collectivism was beginning to make an ominous appearance. The Budget of 1909 had, in fact, caused dissension amongst the Adullamites themselves, some being prepared to embark upon open warfare against the party which stood for Tariff Reform, others being unwilling to swallow the Budget and the Radical programme associated with it even for the sake of Free Trade. Upon this rock the Unionist Free Trade Club split, some joining the Free Trade League, an avowedly Radical association, others, with Cromer at their head, forming a new organization, the Constitutional Free Trade Association. "I find it very difficult to co-operate heartily with a body which contains members such as Mr. Ramsay MacDonald," he wrote when tendering his resignation of the Presidentship of the Manchester Free Trade League.

To Cromer, swept hither and thither in this maelstrom of political inconsistency, hard put to it to steer a safe course between the Scylla of Socialism on the one side

and the Charybdis of economic heresy on the other, one thing at least had become clear. If disaster was to be averted, the moderate men of all parties must sink all minor differences and stand together to stem the tide, and, if possible, must do so without involving the country in a grave internal cataclysm. Saved by his long residence abroad from the political myopia from which, as it seemed to him, the leaders of all parties in England were suffering, he perceived two imminent dangers to the country, one domestic, the other foreign ; and from now onwards his every action was dominated by a desperate determination to do all that lay in his power to ward them off. He feared the destruction of the House of Lords as an effective second chamber, since nothing then could stay the enthronement of Count of Heads as the Divine Court of Appeal on every question and interest of mankind ; and he feared above all things a European conflagration.

How was the former to be avoided without throwing the country into such a state of disorder as would render her impotent to face successfully the latter ? Only, clearly, by a display of statesmanship of the highest order. With complete self-abnegation, Cromer devoted his thought and energy to encompassing this tremendous task.

In opposition to the decision of the leaders of the Conservative Party, he spoke strongly against the rejection by the House of Lords of the Budget of 1909. He knew well that, in tendering the advice which he did, he would be accused of a lack of moral courage ; for that he cared little. He knew equally well that he would be accused of urging a course which involved the abdication by the House of Lords of the very functions for which a second chamber existed. He had been warned that if, in face of the threats which had been made against them they now shrank from the performance of their plain duty, " the time-honoured institution " to which they belonged would " fall at the blast of the Limehouse and Newcastle trumpet." He did not underestimate the cogency of

these arguments ; but he reminded his audience that there was a consideration of a different order to which adequate attention had not been paid, and which, in his opinion altogether outweighed the arguments urged in favour of the rejection of the Bill. Although at the moment Europe was fortunately at peace, he was unable to view the future without serious misgivings, and he regarded with dismay the inauguration of a state of things which, by producing acute and prolonged dissensions in the country, might not improbably cripple it in the event of a great national emergency arising. It could not be doubted that the result of throwing out the Bill would be to produce fierce political strife, for it would compel even the most moderate members of the Liberal Party to engage in a ceaseless agitation in order to secure a material alteration, not merely in the composition, but in the functions of the second chamber. He concluded his argument with an impressive warning :

“ I consider that the first and greatest national necessity at this moment is to provide, both from a naval and military point of view, for the adequate defence of this country ; and I should more especially view with a feeling little short of dismay anything calculated to risk a break in the continuity of that naval policy as to the main principles of which both parties in the State are now agreed. I may be right or wrong in pushing this view to the extent to which I push it, and I am quite free to admit that I hold this opinion so strongly that it colours my views on all other political matters and makes them subordinate to that one great consideration. . . . What I fear is that in the presence of distracted counsels, and of the great temptation which will be presented on both sides to influence and conciliate the mass of the electors by incurring not reasonable but extravagant expenditure on social reforms, the main duty of the nation, which is to render its own existence secure, will be rather lost sight of in the Constitutional struggles which must ensue. . . . On the whole, therefore, I have come to the conclusion that, objectionable

“ as this Budget is, we cannot reject it without incurring other and more formidable risks than would be involved in its acceptance. Let me add that I have come to this conclusion in my own mind quite irrespective of the question of Free Trade *versus* Tariff Reform. Important though that issue is, it appears to me almost to sink into insignificance by the side of the further and very important issues which will now be raised.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that his speech made a great impression, and that he carried many with him ; but circumstances were too strong for him, and his advice was disregarded.

With the danger thus brought one step closer to the country's door, Cromer considered the position afresh. More urgent than ever did the necessity of sinking all minor differences now appear ; and, strong Free Trader though he was, he determined to force this issue into the background in face of more imperious necessities. “ My main bone of contention with some ” – i.e. Unionist Free Traders – “. . . with whom I should very much like to agree,” he wrote in February 1910, “ is not that we disagree upon the merits of any special issue – for such is far from being the case – but that, in my opinion, they are guilty of what I consider to be a great political error – that is to say, they do not take sufficient account of the *relative* importance of each issue.”<sup>2</sup>

Quite apart from the fact that it violated Free Trade principles, Cromer had always doubted the wisdom of any scheme of Colonial preference. So far back as the year 1900 he had written that he thought it a pity that Canada had ever been encouraged to give Great Britain preferential treatment, and a matter for regret that the offer, when made, had been accepted. But in 1910 he realized that the Conservative Party were too deeply committed to draw back. “ If this is the case,” he wrote, when it was seen that the result of the General Election of January 1910 had been to confirm Mr. Asquith in office,

<sup>1</sup> Speech in the House of Lords, November 23rd, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Mr. Bernard Mallet.

"the next best thing to do would be to define what they (the Tariff Reformers) intend to do, and, under all the circumstances of the case, if they choose to put 1s. or even 2s. duty on corn, and promised to go no further than that, I should be inclined, albeit reluctantly, to support them, in order to save the country from the greater dangers of letting the extreme Socialists in."<sup>1</sup>

Largely through his efforts, a statement was made by the Leader of the Conservative Party agreeing, in the event of that party being returned to power, to the question of a change in the fiscal policy of the country being re-submitted to the electors by means of a Referendum. Armed with this authority, Cromer, as President of the recently formed Constitutional Free Trade Association, issued on November the 30th, 1910, a manifesto to the Press, over the signatures of the Executive Committee of that body, urging all moderate men, whether Free Traders or not, to support Unionist candidates in every constituency at the impending election.

With the failure of the Conservative Party at the election in December, a fresh problem of infinite difficulty faced those who, like Lord Cromer, were still able to keep their eyes on the tendencies displaying themselves abroad as well as upon actual happenings at home. For it was now clear that the Government were determined to force their issue with the House of Lords, even to the extent of creating a sufficient number of peers to secure the passage of their Bill in the event of the Conservative Party in that House proving obdurate. What line ought the Conservative Party to take? Cromer was not prepared to express an opinion until he had been able to give the matter mature thought. "The question which I ask myself," he wrote on May the 2nd, 1911, "is, apart from any personal feelings, whether it is, or is not, in the best interests of all these classes [i.e. those holding Conservative and Moderate views] to force the creation of these peers? I am certainly somewhat inclined at present to

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. St. Loe Strachey, February 1st, 1910.

answer this question in the negative ; but I have not yet made up my mind, and I am quite open to conviction." To this letter he added a postscript :

" So far as I can gather from such conversations as I have had, the feeling generally in the Lords is not at all in accordance with my views. But against that I have in my own mind to balance the fact that up to the present time the leadership of the Unionist Party, which the majority have followed, has not been at all of a nature to inspire me with such confidence as to render me disposed to sacrifice my personal opinion."<sup>1</sup>

With further thought, his opinion as to the supreme unwisdom of pursuing any course which would force the Government to a large creation of peers hardened ; and by the middle of July he was contemplating the disagreeable possibility of having to go into the lobby for the Parliament Bill.

" Every vote will of course count," he wrote on the 13th of that month, " and unless — which is possible, but I fear not very probable — the opposition of the extremists<sup>2</sup> fizzles out a good deal before the final tussle comes, I fear we shall all be placed in the cruel alternative of either letting the Bill be defeated, or else voting with this infernal Government to prevent its own defeat."<sup>3</sup>

From this time onward matters moved rapidly. Two amendments of substance were made in the Bill before it left the House of Lords. Thereupon the Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, wrote to Mr. Balfour intimating that the Bill would be returned to the House of Lords in substantially the same form as that in which it had left the House of Commons, and that the Ministers had been already informed by the King that in the event of further

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Balfour of Burleigh.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. the " diehards " who, under the leadership of Lord Halsbury, were determined to vote against the Bill at all costs.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Lord Middleton.

resistance His Majesty would be prepared to create a sufficient number of peers to secure its passage.

At this critical juncture Cromer was invited by Lord Crewe, then Leader of the Liberals in the House of Lords, to come and see him. What Lord Crewe wished to say was, that the Government were determined to have the Bill, and that the only point under consideration was whether they should invite the King to create a sufficient number of peers at once, or whether they should stay their hand, risk the rejection of the Bill, and in that event secure a creation of peers in anticipation of the re-introduction of the measure during an autumn session. A decision on this point would probably depend on how many Unionist peers would be prepared to vote with the Government. At a meeting of Conservative peers held at Lansdowne House on July the 21st, it had been decided that the leaders of the party would advise their followers to abstain from voting. "There is not the least probability of the leaders in the House of Lords voting with the Government or of asking others to vote," Cromer wrote on the 28th of the month. But he added that there were without doubt a considerable number of peers, of whom he was one, who, rather than see the House of Lords swamped, would under protest vote with the Government.<sup>1</sup> And there is not the smallest doubt that in order to avert what he regarded as so grave a disaster as an immediate creation of peers, he was not only prepared to assure Lord Crewe of his own vote, but to endeavour to secure the names of a sufficient number of peers who would accompany him into the Government lobby to justify them in holding their hand.

On August the 2nd Cromer saw Lord Crewe both in the morning and in the afternoon, mainly with the object of ascertaining what number of Unionist peers would be required to vote with the Government in order to obviate any fresh creation; and, in the event of a Government defeat, how many new peers would be created. On the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. Arnold Ward.

second point Lord Crewe was able to give an immediate answer – as many as would be required to make the passage of the Bill certain, which might be three hundred, possibly even more. On the first point he could not commit himself until the matter had been considered by the Cabinet on the following morning. On August the 3rd, Cromer again saw Lord Crewe. The situation had undergone a swift change. There were, no doubt, objections from the point of view of the Government – as there were from the point of view of the Opposition – to the conclusion of a bargain of any sort. At any rate, as a result of the deliberations of the Cabinet on the morning of August the 3rd, the idea of an immediate creation of peers was abandoned; the Government were prepared to risk temporary defeat in view of their knowledge that with but little delay defeat could be turned into victory. “You will see that the situation has entirely changed,” Cromer wrote in reporting the result of his interview to Lord Lansdowne; “there is now no question of an immediate creation of peers. The Government are prepared to risk their Bill without any understanding with any section of the Unionist Party. It appears to me that this is a very considerable point gained.”

But the danger of the House of Lords being swamped was only postponed, not averted; how best could it be met? At a meeting between Cromer and some fifteen or twenty peers at the house of Lord Bath on the morning of August the 4th, it was decided to abandon any idea of organizing a Unionist vote on behalf of the Government, since it was considered certain that any such action would drive the Duke of Norfolk and those who were acting with him into the lobby against the Government. Those who as a last resort were prepared to vote with the Government would be guided by events. Two days before the fateful division, Cromer was incapacitated by an attack of gout and was compelled to take to his bed. The final act of the drama, as he saw it, was set forth in a letter to Sir Edmund Gosse :

Xc



“ You have taken so much interest in the whole of these  
“ proceedings that I think you may like to see the  
“ enclosed Memorandum.  
“ Four incidents happened which in a greater or less  
“ degree, rendered the position very perilous. The  
“ first was Lansdowne’s letter to the papers. I implored  
“ him not to write it, but the influence of the whips and  
“ party managers was too strong. This detached from  
“ my side a good many who would otherwise have  
“ voted, as it was naturally read in the sense that  
“ Lansdowne not merely invited his followers to abstain  
“ but deprecated the conduct of those who voted with  
“ the Government. As we now know, if some of them  
“ had not voted with the Government, the House of  
“ Lords would have been swamped, and Lansdowne’s  
“ own position would have become almost impossible.  
“ In the second place, Norfolk’s dubious attitude has  
“ caused us a great deal of trouble. It made us give up  
“ our organization which would have enabled us to put  
“ a much larger number into the Government lobby,  
“ as we were told that if we went on with it a great  
“ many of the abstainers would follow Norfolk into the  
“ ‘ditcher’ camp. Here again we were wrong, for  
“ Norfolk, I think very unreasonably, was not content  
“ with our giving up our organization, and broke away  
“ from his pledge of abstention.<sup>1</sup> However, he only  
“ carried some half a dozen peers with him. The third  
“ incident, which was very serious, was St. Aldwyn’s  
“ defection. I had fully understood from him that if  
“ Norfolk voted with the ‘ditchers,’ he would be  
“ prepared to vote himself with the Government. At  
“ the last moment he fought shy. I had relied upon  
“ him to give the lead.  
“ The fourth point was this wretched attack of gout I  
“ have had, which confined me to my bed at a most  
“ critical moment. It was within an ace of being of  
“ historic importance, for to my knowledge many peers  
“ were only waiting for a lead, and, in default of action  
“ on the part of St. Aldwyn, I should have given it to  
“ them. This I was unable to do ; however, I let my  
“ opinion be widely known. I got Heneage to explain

<sup>1</sup> The Duke of Norfolk had, however, made it known that if any Unionist peers voted with the Government he would consider himself free from his engagement, and would join Lord Halsbury and his supporters in the lobby against the Government.

“ it for me in the House of Lords, and I wrote and saw  
“ a good many doubtful peers who eventually voted  
“ with the Government.  
“ However, all’s well that ends well. It has been very  
“ uphill work, but I really think I may flatter myself  
“ that my humble efforts were not altogether in vain.  
“ It would have been perfectly monstrous if a small  
“ minority of the Halsbury lot had been able to enforce  
“ a decision which was entirely contrary to the general  
“ feeling of the House. The peril is now past, but it  
“ was rather a near thing.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated August 12th, 1911.

## CHAPTER XXX

### LAST DAYS

SO soon as he was sufficiently recovered from the attack which incapacitated him from playing a part in person in the final scene in the Constitutional drama, Cromer repaired to Scotland. From this time onwards his health gave increasing cause for anxiety. In the autumn of 1913 he had a fainting fit, and was obliged to withdraw from active participation in public affairs; and during the spring of 1914 a further attack brought him to death's door, compelling him, as has already been stated, to relinquish his position as chairman of the committee which was dealing with the establishment of a School of Oriental Studies in London.

Care snatched him from the jaws of death and prolonged his life until 1917; but he felt that he no longer had the strength to take any serious part in the controversies in which the country was still unhappily involved. He regretted that, in spite of the verdict given at the two General Elections of 1910, the Conservative Party should still insist on pinning their flag to the Tariff Reform mast. For this obduracy he laid the blame on the group of extreme Protectionists in the ranks of the party. It seemed to him that the Union with Ireland was to be sacrificed, and a Government tainted with Socialist principles was to be kept in power, merely because a number of politicians had pledged themselves up to the hilt to what he regarded as a mistaken policy. He realized, however, that it was now of little use arguing the matter, and he was so convinced of the desirability of supporting the Unionist cause that he would not, for all their folly, "raise a voice or lift a finger to do them [the Unionists] any harm."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. John Murray, December 10th, 1912.

He continued to write for the *Spectator*, and occasionally for other publications ; but he was unwilling to add to his labours. "I am just about to enter my seventy-fourth year, and, from the point of view of health, I am steadily going downhill," he wrote in February 1914, in reply to a request for a contribution to a new review ; and he added in further explanation :

"I have, as you may have observed, almost entirely withdrawn from taking any active share in public business, and, although I still have some duties, I am endeavouring gradually to get rid of them. Also I write a few short articles in the *Spectator*, which do not cause me much labour. But I have lost touch of foreign affairs lately, and it is a very different thing to write long and serious articles such as you would require. I really am not up to it, so you must excuse me."<sup>1</sup>

The outbreak of war caused him no surprise, for he had foreseen it, and had never ceased warning his countrymen of the danger both in his public utterances and in his private correspondence. "Although I am by no means a panic-monger," he wrote in November 1911, "at the same time I cannot hide from myself the fact that the German danger is very real." He was willing to admit that the German Government had in the crisis of that year behaved well ; but he thought that their attitude had been dictated less by righteousness than by self-interest – "they were evidently scared when they got to the brink of the precipice and startled at the war spectre which they had themselves done so much to evoke." Moreover, it was not only possible, but probable, that their moderation had been to a very considerable extent due to the fact that their naval programme had not been fully carried out ; "in two years," he added, "it will be complete." He recalled the fact that Bismarck had said years before that England should be made the lightning conductor of all the hatreds in existence on the Continent.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. T. G. Bowles.

The result had been that, largely under Government instruction, the Press had for years past been preaching Anglophobia ; the professors had echoed the cry ; the Emperor, by the inauguration of his *Welt-politik*, had contributed ; the Naval League had vigorously responded ; everything, in fact, had been done to lash popular excitement into a frenzy and to stimulate the avarice of the German traders who were looking out for new markets and large profits. The concluding passage of the letter of which the above is a summary, was prophetic :

“ The result is the present very dangerous state of public opinion in Germany. The evil spirit having once been let out of the bottle, I very greatly doubt whether the authorities, even supposing they were so minded, can cork him up again. There is only one remedy for this ; let us keep our heads and avoid unnecessary provocation, but at the same time let there be no manner of doubt that the only way to parry the danger is by the maintenance of a very strong navy and a fairly strong army. As to France, the animosity of the Germans against the French is, so far as I can gather, very much less than it is against ourselves. At the same time, if France is attacked we must certainly come to her assistance, and the only way we can effectively do so is to land 120,000 men somewhere on the coast of France to operate on the flank of a German army advancing to Paris. This I think we ought to be prepared to do.”<sup>1</sup>

In the evening of life, with his strength well-nigh spent and the shadows gathering round him, what could he do for the land that he loved so well, now that she was faced with the supreme ordeal ? “ I feel as if I had severed my connection with one world without entering into communication with another,” he had been heard murmuring during that illness in the spring of 1914, when he had stood on the very threshold of death. But his course was not yet run ; and, to the amazement of all who were

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Hon. A. Elliot, November 15th, 1911.

familiar with the facts, he regained for a time some measure of his former strength. Still, there was no very obvious task beyond that of steadying public opinion by well-informed writing in the weekly, and sometimes in the daily Press.

"Politicians must, of course, stand aside until the god of battles has delivered his verdict," he wrote on August the 10th, 1914. But his brain was as active as ever, and before the war was many days old he was pondering upon the objects to be aimed at when the time came for making peace. He put his thoughts on paper in letters to his friends and in particular to Mr. St. Loe Strachey, who, of all the leaders in the journalistic world, was closest to him in ideals and outlook. He did not wish, even if such a thing were possible, to see the Germans crushed out of existence — "The only result would be an extreme predominance on the part of the Slav, which would be only one degree better than pan-Germanism."<sup>1</sup> Nor did he think that it would be wise, assuming that the Allies were victorious, that they should attempt to dictate changes in the internal government of Germany or Austria. The matter was one which might safely be left to the Germans and the Austrians themselves. "With regard to the disappearance of the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs, I should think it probable that if Germany is seriously defeated, as I confidently believe she will be, the Germans themselves will see the necessity of a change."<sup>2</sup> What must at all costs be ensured was that the Germans should be disabled from disturbing further the peace of the world :

"It would be very desirable, if possible, supposing we  
"are successful in the war, to adopt some measure  
"which would in the future prevent Germany being a  
"nuisance to the whole of Europe. It is the Germans,  
"and they only, who for the last quarter of a century  
"have kept up the fear of war, and have obliged every

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lady Alice Shaw Stewart.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Dr., afterwards Sir Herbert, Warren, September 22nd, 1914.

“nation to burden itself with these enormous armaments. It may be possible to draw the Germans’ teeth for the time being, but it will be very difficult to cripple them for any length of time. They have such resources and intelligence that they are sure to spring up again. You may remember that Napoleon tried to crush Prussia out of existence after Jena, and wholly failed. Scharnhorst invented the system of passing men through the ranks into the reserve, and Stein set the Tugendbund going, which entirely frustrated the French plan and enabled the Prussians to bring a large army into the field at the time Leipsic was fought.”<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1916 work of an official nature was offered him. A Commission was to be appointed to inquire into the Dardanelles Expedition ; would Lord Cromer serve as chairman ? Those who were closest to him doubted his ability to stand the strain likely to be imposed by such a labour. He himself knew that they were right ; but here was one last service that he could render to his country, and his sense of duty was not to be denied. “ I know that it will kill me,” he replied, “ but young men are giving their lives for their country, so why should not I who am old ? ” The task was a long and difficult one. In December he was kept to his house by an attack of influenza, and, when he was sufficiently recovered, the Commission continued its sittings there. A great gentleness of manner had come to him in these twilight days, and the task which he had undertaken can scarcely have been other than distasteful to him. It seemed to him that his colleagues were harsh in judgment. Out of his long and profound experience of human frailty he had himself learned to judge leniently the mistakes of men. His labour was nearly at an end. He was able to sign the first part of the Commission’s Report from a bed of sickness in January 1917. It was the last use he made of the pen which had been the constant companion of his later years, for on January the 29th he died. He had,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. St. Loe Strachey, August 10th, 1914.

indeed, continued to render diligent and faithful service to the State –

*Till, like a clock worn out with eating time,  
The wheels of weary life at last stood still.*<sup>1</sup>

At his own wish, he was buried at Bournemouth by the side of his first wife ; but it was within the walls of the Valhalla of their race that the nation paid their last tribute to one of the greatest of their sons. And, in the words of Wesley's anthem, as they rose gloriously from the chancel and echoed down the ancient aisles, he found a fitting epitaph :

“ The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad  
“ for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as  
“ the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice  
“ with joy and singing, for in the wilderness shall waters  
“ break out, and streams in the desert.”

<sup>1</sup> Dryden's “ Œdipus.”



## EPILOGUE

IT may be said of Evelyn Baring, first Earl of Cromer, that even before his death he became a figure in history. He was known throughout the world as the Maker of Modern Egypt. His claim to this title rests on events which have been set forth with detached impartiality in the pages of his own graphic survey of thirty years of Egyptian history. He stressed the fact that it was history with which he was there concerned. "In writing this book, I have throughout endeavoured to render it as little autobiographical as possible."<sup>1</sup> The accidents of his public life, as he explained, had afforded him special opportunities for compiling certain chapters of Egyptian history ; and what he aimed at was the presentation of an accurate record for the benefit of posterity. In telling the story of Cromer's life I have necessarily viewed the same events from a somewhat different angle. It has been my endeavour to paint in that part of the canvas which Cromer himself intentionally left bare.

A perusal of the history of Egypt during the last quarter of the nineteenth century leaves upon the mind three broad impressions : in the first place, that under the guidance of Ismail Pasha the Egyptian ship of State was heading for the rocks ; secondly, that with the sudden gripping of the helm by a strong hand disaster was averted and smooth water reached ; and finally, that the hand that seized the helm and steered the ship to safety was that of the little-known officer of artillery who first stepped unostentatiously on board at the request of Mr. Goschen in the spring of the year 1877.

It is clear from his private correspondence that on his return to Egypt in 1883, after his term of service as

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 106.

Financial Member in Lord Ripon's Government in India, Baring found himself at grips with a situation more difficult than any that he had to deal with during the whole of his official life. It is equally clear that, after a period of uncertainty during which he was feeling his way, he took the helm into his own hands; and it has been my business to conduct the reader to the chart-room where he was to be seen at work navigating the ship. What are the impressions to be derived from these intimate glimpses of the man at work in the seclusion of the conning-tower? From the considerable mass of "private written intercourse" of which I have been permitted to make use, and which Cromer himself rated far above "ponderous official despatches and worm-eaten memoirs" as material for biography, certain definite characteristics clearly emerge and may now be brought together in an attempt to present a completed portrait.

Above all things Cromer stands out, sharply delineated against a background of confused events, of conflicting counsel and, at times, of indecision in high places, as a man of action; a man who habitually talked little, but who invariably did much. Though he was exceptionally well read, and was himself a polished writer, he never became a great speaker. The matter of his speeches was always superior to his delivery of them. Hencever understood, as Sir Edmund Gosse once observed, how to fill a large space with his voice. It is doubtful if the art was one for which he ever really cared. "I can, as you know," he told Lord Crewe, "muddle through a speech somehow or other, although it agonizes me; but I cannot orate."<sup>1</sup>

But if he spoke with diffidence, he wrought magnificently. In action he was neither impulsive nor over-cautious; he thought, indeed, that caution within reasonable limits was wholly commendable, but that carried to excess it paralysed effective action. His

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated June 18th, 1910.

estimates of others provide a key to his own view of the qualities essential in the make-up of a man of action. Dissenting from the view of the typical idealist in politics, he held that Cavour was a much greater man than Mazzini. His judgment of Woodrow Wilson was equally significant. The President of the United States, he thought, had been given during the earlier years of the Great War one of the grandest opportunities ever offered to a statesman ; but that, for the reason that he was devoid of the qualities of a true man of action, he had failed to seize it. His very virtues had proved obstacles to success in the domain of statecraft. "Great intellectual attainments and sound academic training were not the qualities most of all required to deal with a situation which called for strong resolution. . . ."<sup>1</sup> He passed a similar judgment on another man of acknowledged genius. There were probably few men with whom he found himself in more complete accord upon the many questions which excited their common interest than Alfred Lyall ; yet, in spite of his great admiration for him, he felt bound to admit that an excess of caution militated against any claim which might be preferred on his behalf to be regarded as a successful man of action. "He never appeared to me to realize sufficiently," he wrote, "that the conduct of public affairs, notably in this democratic age, is at best a very rough, unscientific process ; that it is occasionally necessary to make a choice of evils or to act on imperfect evidence ; and that at times, to quote the words which I remember Lord Northbrook once used to me, it is even better to have a wrong opinion than to have no definite opinion at all."<sup>2</sup>

Cromer himself was seldom driven to this latter expedient. "A wise man thinks of both *pro* and *con*," runs a Sanskrit proverb. Cromer always thought of

<sup>1</sup> See an article entitled "A Neutral on the War," first published in the *Spectator* of January 22nd, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> See an article entitled "Sir Alfred Lyall" first published in the *Quarterly Review* for July 1913.

both *pro* and *con* before he permitted himself to draw conclusions from any given premises; and, since he possessed an unusually well-balanced mind, the conclusions which he eventually drew were almost invariably sound. "Such far-sighted statesmanship," wrote a close observer of events at the time of the Fashoda crisis, "almost 'shackles accident and bolts up chance.'"<sup>1</sup>

He possessed in exceptional measure the strength essential to success in the man of action. He had nothing of the aggressive self-assertiveness which is sometimes mistaken for strength in public men; he was, indeed, the very antithesis of the man who thinks that there is "nothing like lifting up your voice, making yourself a nuisance, and showing a bold front."<sup>2</sup> Baring's own strength was the greater for its restraint. He derived it from three main sources—his own complete disinterestedness, his poise of mind, which was such as to render any necessity for the re-consideration of conclusions at which he had once arrived extremely unlikely, and, finally his highly developed moral sense. He acted without fear of consequences, because the touchstone to which he instinctively submitted all his actions was that of the Christian moral code.

"It is essential," he wrote when dealing with the government of subject races, "that each special issue should be decided mainly with reference to what, by the light of Western knowledge and experience tempered by local considerations, we conscientiously think is best for the subject race, without reference to any real or supposed advantage which may accrue to England as a nation, or—as is more frequently the case—to the special interests represented by some one or more influential classes of Englishmen."

He admired Lord Lyons, not because he was a man of outstanding talents—he was not, indeed, prepared

<sup>1</sup> Dean Butcher.

<sup>2</sup> Lucian.

to credit him with genius – but because he was assiduous in maintaining the reputation of British diplomacy for honesty and straightforward dealing. British diplomacy as practised by him did not reveal “a single feature which calls for the reprobation of the moralist.” The record was an honourable one. Throughout the whole period of Lord Lyons’ official life, British policy was directed to no unworthy ends. It was controlled by men who might at times have shown want of skill or judgment, but who were always animated by high motives.<sup>1</sup> His opinion of crooked diplomacy and of the man who practised it is well expressed by words spoken by Achilles: “He is hateful to me as the gates of Hades who thinks one thing in his mind and utters another.”

His confidence in himself, based on these sure foundations, inspired confidence in others. One of the periodic crises which ruffled the waters of Anglo-Egyptian history occurred when Lord Salisbury, who was then Prime Minister, was resting at his villa in the south of France. Cromer telegraphed to him in cipher, explaining the circumstances and tendering his advice. Lord Salisbury had with him the box containing the Foreign Office code, but had mislaid the key. Ignorant both of the nature of the problem and of the advice tendered for its solution, but guessing that the matter was probably urgent, he cabled back *en clair*, “Do as you like,” and the crisis was satisfactorily surmounted.

His self-reliance rendered him singularly indifferent to criticism – particularly to criticism in the Press. At the time of the Gordon Mission he became a target for vehement attack; but while the Press stormed and thundered he remained silent and unmoved. At another time he was assailed on the ground that he took no trouble to preserve the ancient monuments of Egypt. The charge came to the ears of Lord Salisbury – indeed, it was shouted at him.

<sup>1</sup> See articles entitled “Lord Lyons,” first published in the *Spectator* of October 11th and 18th, 1913.

"I am pressed very earnestly about these Egyptian monuments," he wrote. "There is an impression that you do not care about the subject." While he himself felt sure that Baring would do all that was possible in face of the difficulties which existed, he thought it well to remind him of the almost universal human tendency to use antiquities as a quarry. The greater part of Melrose had gone in building neighbouring cottages, and he felt pretty certain that in proportion as prosperity grew in Egypt, the profitable uses to which an ancient sarcophagus could be put would necessarily increase. Baring explained his difficulties, and the steps which he was taking with a view to overcoming them. He had been working at the problem for months. "Indeed, I think it has given me more trouble than almost any Egyptian question I have ever had to deal with." The main difficulty was one of persons. "The *odium Egyptologicum* is strong. One of the difficulties in dealing with this question is that what one Egyptologist most of all hates is another Egyptologist." As to the charge against him that he took no personal interest in the matter, that had been started by a Mr. W——

"He wrote to me and called on me when I was in London. He intimated that unless he could get all he wanted at once he would have to abuse me, or cause me to be abused, in the papers. I told him that I did not think that would further his cause much, but I begged him earnestly not to desist if he was of an opposite opinion."<sup>1</sup>

He was always chary of accepting newspaper estimates of public men at their face value, and in particular, as he once told Lord Salisbury, he always "rather shuddered" at the idea of Press favourites being sent to Egypt. "A Press reputation is to my mind worth a good deal less than nothing." He disliked undue publicity, because he thought that a man was likely to

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Lord Salisbury, January 2nd, 1891.

be influenced by his hopes or fears of what might be said about him. "My personal experience," he wrote, "rather leads me to the conclusion that what Pericles said of women holds good about British officials in the East – that is to say, that the less they are talked about the better. I have noticed that on many occasions the really good work done has varied in the inverse proportion of the degree of public attention which it has attracted, whether in the sense of praise or blame."<sup>1</sup> As was observed two centuries ago by William Penn, "Fear and gain are great perverters of mankind, and, where either prevail, the judgment is violated." He admired Delane as an outstanding character in the world of journalism; but he admired "sturdy old Lord Russell" more, because at a time when politicians almost without exception were displaying a deference amounting at times even to subserviency to the all-powerful editor, he "steadfastly refused to bow the knee to the journalistic Baal."<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his career in Egypt, Cromer was the most accessible of men; but he kept aloof, so far as possible, from writers in the Press. Approached on one occasion "with infinite tact" for material for an authentic obituary notice of himself, he replied curtly that the question was not one in which he was interested.<sup>3</sup> To another applicant in quest of "copy" he was equally discouraging: "I shall be happy to see you if you will call at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. I shall regard our interview as strictly private. I have the strongest objections to being interviewed in the technical sense of the term, or, in fact, to anything I may say being repeated in the Press." His equable temperament predisposed him to shun extremes. Guided by a shrewd common sense, he pursued triumphantly the middle way, in politics as in every other activity in life. "There was

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to Sir Sidney Low's book, *Egypt in Transition*.

<sup>2</sup> See an article entitled "Delane of *The Times*," first published in the *Spectator* of January 15th, 1916.

<sup>3</sup> *Social and Diplomatic Memories*, by Sir J. Rennell Rodd.

never a moment," he told Lord Salisbury in 1898, "when we wanted more careful guidance, for the jingo wave, with its good and bad points, is running pretty high. I am afraid that just at present I am most unwillingly rather adding to its volume." Bigots and rhapsodists exasperated him. The man who rejected compromise naturally tended to intolerance of the opinions of others and to an overweening degree of confidence in his own judgment. Extreme pacifists were quite as responsible as, and perhaps even more responsible than, extreme chauvinists for the outbreak of wars. The trouble with idealists was that they blossomed into visionaries; with severely practical men that they degenerated into mere empiricists. He admired Sir Frederick Weld because in his dealing with subject races he adopted principles that lay halfway between "the pernicious extremes of harshness and sentimentality, both of which are equally hurtful." Sound statesmanship was generally to be found "in discovering what would be called in statics the resultant between two extreme lines of thought and action."

His own strong humanitarian leanings were balanced by an equally instinctive appreciation of realities. He was never carried away by "words and formulæ." It was one of his criticisms of democracy that it developed "a Shandean tendency to become 'hobby-horsical.'" A fetish was made of ideals which very often contained the germs of some thoroughly sound principle, and the idealists were over-prone to regard as their sworn enemies all those who, albeit they often agreed in the objects to be attained, were inclined to doubt the wisdom of some of the methods proposed for attaining them.<sup>1</sup> He noted with complete agreement an *obiter dictum* of Lord Morley that "the most ostentatious faith in humanity in general seems always to beget the sharpest mistrust of all human beings in particular."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Nationalism in the Near East," the *Spectator* of September 11th, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> In *Robespierre*.



For all his attachment to the Christian moral code, his was not the type of mind which submitted easily to authority in the matter of religion. During his residence in Malta he had been thrown for companionship on a young staff officer whom he described as "a most pleasant companion" and a devout churchman who possessed "that singularly uncritical frame of mind which in religious matters makes for Catholicism." The Evelyn Baring of those days rebelled against the narrow belief that there was only one truth, and that anyone who failed to find it would lose his soul. With jesting Pilate he asked what was truth, and dwelt on the advantages of toleration. But he admitted that he was no more successful in convincing him of the soundness of his point of view than his companion was in converting him to his. "He used to defend persecution," he noted, "and I feel convinced that, in spite of his undoubted friendship for me, he would, had the law permitted such a course, have thought it his duty to burn me in order to save the souls of others from contagion."<sup>1</sup>

Baring had himself had reason to appreciate the consolation which the religion of the Church of Rome was capable of affording at a moment when "earthly shadows flee"; and he had often watched with admiration the self-sacrifice of the devoted emissaries who had gone forth from Rome into all lands to teach and preach; but he was far too deeply attached to the liberty of conscience which he claimed for himself, and accorded to others, for it to be possible for him ever to reconcile himself to the imperious demand of the Church of Rome that a man should entrust it to the keeping of any other human being. In matters of religion he was, in fact, essentially a modernist. If a religious belief could not adapt itself to the requirements which were constantly cropping up as the world grew older, one of two things was likely to happen. Either society advanced, and the religious belief was stranded and eventually forgotten, or the creed held society in its

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notes.

grip and barred the way to advancement.<sup>1</sup> Profoundly as he disagreed with the whole philosophy of Nietzsche, there was one belief which he undoubtedly shared with him, namely, that it was not the dogma which at first won acceptance for the morality of Christianity, but the morality which won acceptance for the dogma. Cromer himself contemplated the hold which revealed religion and theological dogma has on mankind being gradually relaxed; thanks to the extent to which the ethics of Christianity had sunk into the mind of Europe, he did not anticipate the process being attended by any moral cataclysm.<sup>2</sup> He held with Dean Liddon that no hostility to Christian doctrine could justify indifference to the truth, "that the world owes to Christianity the matured idea of progress and the one serious attempt to realize it."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, he went further, and accepted without reserve the statement of Goldwin Smith that

"Humanity, as it passes through phase after phase of the historical movement, may advance indefinitely in excellence, but its advance will be an indefinite approximation to the Christian type. A divergence from that type, to whatever extent it may take place, will not be progress, but debasement and corruption. In a moral point of view, in short, the world may abandon Christianity, but can never advance beyond it."<sup>4</sup>

His own life was lived on this assumption. Meanness of any kind was abhorrent to him. His attitude towards women was typical of his whole moral outlook. "Change the position of women, and one of the main pillars, not only of European civilization, but at all events of the moral code based on the Christian religion, if not of Christianity itself, falls to the ground."<sup>5</sup> No religion, or code of ethics, or social system, which placed women on

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *University Sermons*, 1873.

<sup>4</sup> See an article entitled "The German Historians," first published in the *Spectator* of August 28th, 1915.

<sup>5</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii., p. 539.

a lower plane than that assigned to them in Christianity could hope to compete with it as an elevating and civilizing agency. The further it departed from this standard, the less capable must it prove of playing a part in the progress of mankind. Cromer's main criticism of Islam was that many of the social customs that clustered round its central faith, and notably polygamy and the seclusion of women, stood in the way of its adaptation to the moral needs of advanced communities; and it was inevitable that the amazing cult known as Mormonism, which excited his curiosity and astonishment as a strange by-product of modern progress, should evoke his caustic denunciation. The founder of the creed was either "an impostor or a lunatic," the creed itself "a farrago of nonsense devised to cloak immorality," the principles on which it was based, such as "to outrage every canon of decency and of morality, both public and private." He thought that Burton's publication of a faithful translation of the *Arabian Nights* was a wanton contribution to the pornographic literature of the world, and that the refined obscenity of his own notes was even more offensive than the coarse indecency of the original text.

He was far too much of a realist to be attracted by metaphysical speculation. He regarded a book of the *Iliad* or a play of Aristophanes as of far greater value than the most recondite lucubrations of the philosophers. He would have been a wildly disturbing element among the dwellers in the flying island of Laputa. If he had been asked his views as to the best way of life, he would assuredly have answered in some such words as those put by Lucian into the mouth of Teiresias :

"The life of the ordinary man is the best and most  
"prudent choice; cease from the folly of metaphysical  
"speculation and inquiry into origins and ends, utterly  
"reject their clever logic, count all these things idle  
"talk, and pursue one end alone—how you may do  
"what your hand finds to do, and go your way with  
"ever a smile and never a passion."

It may be thought that in his rugged strength, his austere code, and his brusque exterior are to be found the makings of a somewhat Draconic figure – characteristics which, had circumstances so fallen, would have made of him a despot or a martinet. This in reality was not so, for the more rigorous traits in his personality were tempered by attributes of a different nature. He certainly found little pleasure in entertainments of the official kind. “I have had a rather bad sore throat,” he told Lord Salisbury one day in 1898, “which obliged me to abstain from what are – surely in irony – called social amusements.” He possessed, nevertheless, strong social instincts, and below a rugged surface there lurked a genuine geniality. While far from a hedonist, he was by no means an ascetic. He accepted the good things of life that came his way with the satisfaction of the virile man in enjoyment of what Emerson described as “a good adjustment of the moral and physical nature.” He had none of the pessimism of the brooding and sombre Slav. “It must be singularly mournful and unpleasant,” he remarked, “to pass through life burdened with the reflection that it would have been better not to have been born.”<sup>1</sup> He was wont to submit a man’s claim to be regarded as “human,” in what he himself described as “the true and Terentian meaning of that somewhat ambiguous word,” to two tests – did he love children and was he imbued with what Professor Mackail called “a delightful love of nonsense”? It may be affirmed without hesitation that, judged by these tests, Cromer was essentially human. Because he loved children – a remark which he made about a child has been quoted on page 287 – he was a delightful and much-loved father. The birth of a son by his second marriage was a source of ineffable delight to him in those days when much of the light of former years had grown dim. And he unquestionably possessed a love of nonsense which found expression in his affection for Edward Lear.

<sup>1</sup> “Russian Romance,” the *Spectator* of March 15th, 1913.

Those who knew him well delighted in his quiet sense of humour. "I did not know that M—— was taking such a large interest in general matters here," he wrote from Cairo when he was serving as Commissioner of the Debt. "If I have an opportunity of mentioning to him that a relation of mine made a large fortune by attending exclusively to his own business, I will do so!"<sup>1</sup> The health of the Khedive sometimes caused anxiety in interested quarters. In a letter to Rennell Rodd in the summer of 1900, Cromer wrote: "Mustapha came to me with a telegram and inquired anxiously the meaning of *mal à la gorge sceptique*. I explained as well as I could that the *c* was redundant." Such flashes lit up what was fundamentally a very earnest, and what often appeared on the surface to be a somewhat grim, personality. Anxious on one occasion to secure as witnesses, in a case which was being conducted against the promoters of a gaming-house in Cairo, two officers who were known to have been present when play was in progress, yet unwilling to get them into trouble, he wrote as follows to the officer in command:

"What I want now to ask you is if, under the very special circumstances of the case, you would so far strain your conscience as to turn your head the other way, and take no notice of the breach of discipline involved in the officers being present at the tables? By doing so, you will confer a benefit on the rest of the community, and, indeed, on the rest of the army, who had certainly better not be exposed to the temptations of a public gaming table."<sup>2</sup>

Cromer made it a rule of his life to refrain sedulously from transacting official business when on leave – a rule which a worried locum-tenens, anxious for guidance as to the policy to be pursued towards the tribes at Suakin, was rash enough on one occasion to ignore. If he himself was gifted with a Cromerian sense of humour, he doubtless

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr., afterwards Lord, Goschen.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Major-General Knowles, November 9th, 1896.

received with the chuckle with which it was sent the following answer from his Chief in Scotland: "I sometimes find lob-worms useful for salmon-fishing!"

He was delighted at a misunderstanding on the part of an officer recently appointed to high command in Egypt which led to the insertion of a statement in a Report subsequently presented to Parliament, which, had it not been detected in time, would, as Cromer himself put it, have caused the official world of the Sudan "to rock with Olympian laughter." The officer in question had been informed that Osman Digna, after beating the nogaras, had collected his forces at a certain spot. In drafting his own Report for the Government at home, he had elaborated somewhat the wording of his informant and had written that Osman Digna, "after gaining a decisive victory over the Nogaras, had collected," etc. It was not until some time afterwards that he learned that the nogara was a war drum, and that "beating the nogaras" was equivalent to sending round the fiery cross!

In the battle between the humanities and positive science Cromer proved a doughty champion of the former, since he held, with the late Professor Jebb, that the scientific habit of thought, however valuable in the treatment of special subjects, was not by itself an adequate equipment for dealing with general problems. Moreover, he dreaded the effect which an exclusively scientific education would be likely to have on the moral and religious beliefs of the people. "... On the scientific side," he wrote in 1916, "there are a few fanatics... who would be glad to see the humanities swept out of the educational system altogether. I think this would be disastrous. It would end in materializing the mind of the whole nation."<sup>1</sup> But here, as in all else, Cromer perceived the essential wisdom of the golden mean. If a liberal education based on the humanities afforded the soundest training for the statesman and the man of affairs, there should nevertheless be no boycotting of the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Sir J. Rennell Rodd, July 6th, 1916.

more exact sciences. He feared that there was some truth in Bagehot's satirical remark that in real sound stupidity the English people were unrivalled. In technical and scientific education, at any rate, they had allowed themselves to fall far behind Germany and the United States. This was a grievous mistake. He was aware that Gibbon had given up the study of mathematics without regret because he feared that the habit of relying on rigid demonstration would harden his mind to the finer feelings of moral evidence. But even Gibbon could not compress a whole philosophy of life into an epigram ; and Cromer could not go the whole way with him in his attitude towards the positive sciences. Finance, for example, could not be excluded from the purview of the statesman. It was ubiquitous, and it was unquestionably, in some of its aspects, very close to a positive science. Figures were inflexible, and it was certain that if any nation indulged in " a Corybantic revelry of the emotions to the neglect of facts," it would be certain to be brought up sooner or later by what had been called by St. Augustine " the *odiosa Cantio* of arithmetic."<sup>1</sup> His ideal in education was a fruitful combination of classical learning and scientific knowledge :

" We cannot afford to neglect the teaching of those  
" who were not only the schoolmasters of future ages,  
" but also some of the most acute observers which the  
" world has ever produced of the springs which move  
" human beings to action ; of those whose fertile, ver-  
" satile, and analytical genius may have been equalled,  
" but has certainly never been surpassed ; of those who  
" attached far greater importance to education, in the  
" sense of training and developing the character, than  
" to instruction which merely stores the minds of the  
" pupils with miscellaneous knowledge ; of those who  
" were the fathers alike of arithmetic and oratory, of  
" geometry and moral philosophy ; of those who were  
" not only the fountain head of all our intellectual

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the annual meeting of the British School at Athens, October 27th, 1908.

“possessions, but whose civilization has been recognized by so eminent a theologian as Cardinal Newman to have been so intimately associated with Christianity that it may even be called the soil out of which Christianity sprang.

“More than this. What is the quality most of all required to deal with the political problems of the present age. . . . I say it is the abhorrence of extremes, which was so marked a characteristic of the Greek mind. It is *Sophrosyne*, and, inasmuch as the study of the masterpieces of Greek literature tends to foster that quality, it forms a very useful – I should say an almost indispensable – portion of any liberal education which professes to be a preparation for the exercise of the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a free country.”<sup>1</sup>

His advice to the rising generation blew like a fresh breeze from open spaces through musty class-rooms. “Love your country, tell the truth, and don’t dawdle,” was his exhortation to the boys at Leys School. If there was one thing that he could not tolerate, it was moral vapidity. What shocked him more than anything in politics was not difference of opinion on questions upon their merits, but “the total absence of moral courage in the assertion of sound opinion.”<sup>2</sup>

“A Right Moralist,” wrote William Penn, in *More Fruits of Solitude*, “is a Great and Good Man, but for that Reason he is rarely to be found.” Who shall deny that in this distinguished scion of the British race a Right Moralist had been found? There was, indeed, no man who by reason of his own elevated character, apart altogether from his outstanding services to the State, might more fittingly have found his last resting-place in Westminster Abbey. That tribute was offered to him; but, for reasons which have been given in the closing chapter of the story of his life, it was declined, and he was buried “in a remote and peaceful churchyard emblematic of the

<sup>1</sup> Speech at the Annual Meeting of the British School at Athens, October 27th, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Blythswood, August 12th, 1911.



strength of his affections and the simplicity of his tastes." His name and reputation are, nevertheless, commemorated within the Abbey walls, where, on the west wall of the Lady Margaret Chapel, there hangs a finely executed memorial tablet which records the services and perpetuates the name of one – to recall the discerning words uttered at the unveiling of it by another great proconsul of the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup> – "who throughout a long life devoted a stainless character and high abilities to the good, not merely of his own country, but of mankind, who sought no reward but the fruit of his labours, and who left a name as an administrator second to none among those who by their services have glorified the British race."

<sup>1</sup> The Marquess Curzon of Kedleston.

THE END

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